

22C September 1, 2019

The Path to Heaven.

In recent weeks Jesus has been giving us some very good advice on how to get to heaven.

8/18 he begins by telling his followers: “the father is pleased to give you the kingdom, focus on doing his will and building up treasure that lasts, the treasure of good works, the treasure of putting your faith into action. That will help get you to heaven.

8/25 it was the narrow Gate: In response to the man who asked Jesus: “Will only a few be saved? Jesus responded: “Strive to enter the narrow gate.” He was saying that the path is not an easy one. It requires us to follow the way of Jesus. For Jesus is the gate. He is the way to heaven as he told Thomas in chapter 14 of the Gospel of John.

Today it seems that Jesus has moved away from those heavenly themes to give us some practical advice on how to position ourselves so that we might be honored rather than humiliated at a wedding banquet or similar event. But a closer look says otherwise. Once again, he is giving us some heavenly advice for walking the path that leads to heaven.

Jesus uses the image of the wedding banquet to demonstrate that the invitation to heaven will be extended to those who walk the **path of humility** just as Jesus did when he was on earth.

What is that path? Jesus says: “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The word humility comes from the Latin word humus or ground. To be humble is to be grounded. It means to be down to earth. Jesus humbled himself when he came down to earth. As the scriptures have told us “He lowered himself, he became one like us in all things but sin. He humbled himself by the scandal of being nailed to a cross. He died and was buried in the ground, the ultimate act of humility. Then God exalted him by raising him up on the third day. And he would ascend to the highest spiritual place possible, heaven.

In our first reading the Wisdom writer Ben Sira instructs us that the virtue of humility is a sign of true greatness and in living this virtue we will find favor with God.

But how do we do this? How do we walk the path of humility in a way that finds favor with God and gets us to heaven?

Here are four familiar steps that hopefully we are already taking:

First: The Mass: Humbly acknowledging our need for what Jesus offers in this heavenly banquet that we know as the Mass, which is also called a foretaste of heaven.

Our participation in Sunday Mass gives humble recognition that we need to give thanks and praise to God in the liturgy that he has given to us for that purpose.

Listening to his instruction for living that he gives every Sunday. Putting that instruction into action at home, work, in school etc.

Receiving the Eucharist so we can have the grace to help you do his will, to say yes to whatever he asks you to do.

Second: Prayer: Bringing everything we do to prayer. This week I and two other staff members met with a professional media consultant to discuss some ideas for our school. After beginning with prayer as we always do, the media person with a big smile on her face commented that this was the first time that she had participated in a meeting of this type where the potential client began with prayer. Prayer is our humble acknowledgement that we need God's support in every decision we make.

Third: Reconciliation:

Acknowledging that we are lowly sinners in need of God's forgiveness and mercy.

Sirach tells us that true humility is recognizing the truth about ourselves. Thomas Aquinas said it more succinctly: humility is truth. It is thru the humble confession of our sins that we present our true selves before the Lord with all our faults and failings. We are able to put our ego aside and acknowledge that we are sinners and we need God's forgiveness. And he is always ready to forgive us.

Fourth: Acts of Charity: If we follow the path of humility, we put ourselves in service to God.

We care for the poor, we respect our neighbor, we reject racism and discrimination in all its ugly and subtle forms. We use our gift and talents to serve others not ourselves.

We are not entitled to heaven, to eternal life, or any form of life with God. It is his gift to us. But we must dispose our selves to receive the gift.

Jesus showed us the way to dispose our selves. He showed us how to be raised up from the lowest place to the very highest place. It is the path of humility.

For us the path of humility fruitfully is walked in gratitude through:

- 1. Faithful participation in Sunday Mass**
- 2. Bringing all we do before God with prayer**
- 3. Acknowledging that we are sinners in need of God's mercy**
- 4. Serving others before ourselves through acts of charity**

For Jesus said: "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Gospel Challenge: (Pick at least one) Give thanks to God during **Mass** for blessings received. Bring **prayer** into a meeting where it is not normally included. Return to **Confession** if you have been away. Humble yourself this week by **reaching out to someone in need**.