

**Year C: Proper 17a Jer 2:4-13; Ps 81:1, 10-16; Heb 13:1-8, 15-16; Lk 14:1, 7-14
St. Barnabas, Florissant – September 01, 2019**

Focus Sentence: To humble oneself is simply to live according to true priorities.

I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Well, once again this morning, we have hard words coming to us from the writings of the Old Testament prophets, this morning from the writings of Jeremiah. Through Jeremiah's prophetic writing, we are told that God is actually amazed at the idolatry of Israel. "Cross to Cyprus, and send to Kedar (the far western and eastern limits to the world as it was known to Jeremiah), and see if there has ever been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods?" God marvels that, even though Israel has been the recipient of so many good things from God, yet they have abandoned God and given their worship to idols like Baal.

Of course, today, we continue to abandon God and worship various idols, maybe no longer carved from wood, or fashioned from gold, but idols nevertheless: money, status, power. Lots of things can be the idols that tear us away from loving and worshipping the one true God.

PAUSE

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus witnesses this same chasing after of idols, namely the idol of status. Jesus is at the home of a prominent Pharisee, where he was invited to eat a meal on the Sabbath. Jesus notices the arrogance of guests deliberately choosing the highest places of honor at the dinner table, and Jesus tells them (and us) a parable about humility. Then he goes on to urge us to invite not the rich and powerful to our banquets, but rather the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. We'll be blessed if we do this, Jesus says, because those marginalized people can't repay us for our generosity.

PAUSE

So what is the message of Scripture this morning? What's all this stuff about arrogance and humility?

Well first, few of us, I think, would accuse ourselves, or others, of "exalting" ourselves --- that really sounds like some kind of out-of-date concept.

But the searching for more and more "prestige" --- in particular brands of consumer goods, in cars, in residential areas, vacation spots, jobs --- is an accepted part of our culture. It's a little more subtle --- and much more effective --- than actually bragging, or grabbing a spot at the head table at a wedding reception. We can let our "goods" do the talking by giving the unspoken message: "Success, wealth, power, pleasure; they're all right here."

PAUSE

In our more thoughtful moments, we have to realize that this form of self-exaltation is *borrowed plumage*, *reflected glory*. Those things I mentioned before might be indicators of how successful a person has become in the business world, and therefore indicators of personal capabilities in that realm; but they say absolutely nothing about our real worth as persons. Human worth is not based on capital gains, but on matters of the heart and soul. Even advanced learning --- certified with degrees from prestigious universities --- is nothing unless it leads to caring concern for others.

PAUSE

So, what is humility? To humble yourself, let's be clear, is not to cultivate low self-esteem, but simply to live according to true priorities. To realize that it's the capacity for love, and all that it encompasses --- sharing, encouragement, patience, forgiveness, even suffering and self-sacrifice --- these are the true measures of a person.

Being a retired Latin teacher, I'll point out to you that the word "humility" comes from the Latin word *humus*, which means "fertile ground." In other words, humility is not what we often make of it: a sheepish way of trying to pretend that we are the worst of all and trying to convince others that we are aware of that condition. No, consider the earth, the fertile ground; it's always there, always taken for granted, never remembered, always trodden on by everybody, somewhere we cast and pour out all of our refuse, everything we don't need. The earth is simply THERE, silent and accepting everything but yet in a miraculous way, making out of all that refuse new richness in spite of corruption, transforming corruption itself into a power for life and a new possibility of creativeness.

God never told us that, when we walk into a situation in God's name, that it's *God* who will be crucified and that it's *us* who will be the risen ones. We have to be prepared to walk into situations, one after the other, in God's name, to walk as the Son of God has done: in humility and even humiliation, in truth and ready to be laughed at, trodden upon, or even persecuted for what we believe in and say and dowhen, for instance, someone hits us on one cheek, and we turn the other one; we don't expect to be hit at all, but we do expect to hear the other person say, "Wow, what humility!" No, it really doesn't work that way. We have to pay the cost, and very often get hit hard in various ways. What matters is that we're prepared for that to happen. If we can accept that this day is blessed of God, then every person we meet is a gift of God, every circumstance we meet is a gift of God, whether it's bitter or sweet, whether we like it or not.

PAUSE

Finally, that seemingly unrealistic command of Jesus to invite the uninvited into our homes is something that each of us can actually act upon today. Beyond our circle of best friends, we all know people who are lonely (maybe a widow or widower), to whom an invitation would mean much more than it would to the persons we normally invite.

If we've really understood and grasped Jesus' words about exaltation and humility, we really *can* invite some usually uninvited person today, not out of some "obligation," but because we ourselves know what it's like to be lonely; and we realize that, but for circumstances, we might be in that other person's position. We'll invite someone also, because we know that everyone has something worthwhile to share, some insight to contribute, some interesting story to tell. Every event, and every person, speaks to us of the nature of God's world and God's love for that world.

Of course, doing this might well put us into a position of weakness, but it's a weakness in which God's power can be made manifest. This could well be a situation in which the absence of God in someone's life can be transformed into the presence of God. We can't "capture" God. But whenever we stand outside the arrogant realm of "prestige," and only in the humble realm of mercy, can we there finally "meet" God.

And that, sisters and brothers, is a gift to all of us.

AMEN