

Homily – Lk. 14: 1, 7-14
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C
28th August, 2022

“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and the one who humbles himself will be exalted”.

Going through the Readings of today, the image that powerfully comes to my mind is that of our late Bishop Christy Jones who died on 18th May 2018. Widely known and respected as a man of great humility and humanity, Bishop Christy has definitely touched the lives of many people in our Diocese and beyond.

“He was one of nature’s gentlemen and a lovely gentle pastor”, said Mary McAleese, the 8th president of Ireland to The Irish Times while paying tribute to Bishop Christy Jones. And Bishop Kevin had this to say on Bishop Jones. He said: Bishop Jones will be remembered by many for the way in which he put flesh on the Gospel through his care for, and friendship with those who were poor and most at risk in our society. What better image could we have as we reflect on the Readings of today that summon us to a fresh discovery of all people as our brothers and sisters in the human family.

And speaking of Bishop Christy Jones, well, I remember it was in the first week of April 2018... Fr. Victor from the Cathedral and I went to visit Bishop Christy who by then

was completely confined to his bed due to his illness. He was just peacefully sleeping as we entered his room and so, we thought of leaving the room without disturbing his sleep. But then, he gently opened his eyes and started asking us how we were and then he looked at me and said:

“Yashin, will you pray for me? Will you give me a blessing?”. To be very honest, I was a bit confused. I knew I was in front of a saintly man who was then 56 years a priest and 24 years a Bishop. And I did really feel unworthy and humbled at his request. But then, I blessed him and then immediately knelt down beside his bed asking for his blessing – a moment I can never forget in my life.

Well! All of us perhaps could tell stories about how we have been humbled, not humiliated; but humbled in the presence of the goodness of others, in the presence of the faith of others, in the presence of the ability of others to forgive; may be things that we are trying to do, but still unable to this point.

In today’s Gospel, Luke presents before us Jesus who is dining at the house of one of the leading Pharisees. We’re told that they watched him closely, probably hoping that He might do or say something that they could use against Him. And there, Jesus explains the practical benefits of humility, connecting it with the common wisdom about dining etiquette. Jesus advises the guests to go to the lowest place

instead of seeking places of honor, so that the host may give them the place they really deserve.

When Pope Francis appeared on the papal balcony after his election on 13th March 2013, signs and symbols abounded. He pushed aside the platform that would have raised him above others. He stood simply, without his arms raised in a victorious salute. There was no sense of “I won” or “look at me”. There was an obvious lack of excessive papal finery – just the plain white cassock. Yes! The official photos of that first appearance would show a simple man, simply dressed, exuding humility in gesture and style. And the magic moment of course was, when he asked for the blessing of the people, before he gave the assembly his own papal blessing. I suppose the whole world watched this in awe. Was this really happening? Well! In this simple action, I believe Pope Francis in true humility was acknowledging that all God’s people are called to raise their hands and hearts to the heavens to ask God to shower His blessings and graces on each other.

Well! The Readings of today would present humility not only as a virtue but also as a means of opening our hearts, our minds and our hands to the poor, the needy, the disadvantaged and the marginalized people in our society – a personal responsibility for every authentic Christian. And today’s Gospel warns us against all forms of pride and self-

glorification. The quality of humility that Jesus is talking about also has a sociological dimension because Jesus is inviting us to associate with the so-called “lower classes” of the society - even the outcasts. Jesus invites us to change our social patterns in such a way that we connect with and serve the homeless, the elderly, the addicts and the impoverished — the “street people” of the world — with love.

The Hasidic Rabbi, Levi Yitzhak of the Ukraine, once said that he had discovered the true meaning of love and humility from a pair of drunken friends in a country tavern. While chatting with the owner of the tavern, the rabbi saw these men embracing each other and declaring their love for one another. Suddenly Ivan said to his companion, “Peter, tell me what hurts me!” Sobered by such a startling remark, Peter replied, “How do I know what hurts you?” Ivan’s answer was immediate, “If you don’t know what hurts me, how can you say you love me?” Through their interchange, the two companions underscored the fact that true humility is bending down to look up into the eyes of another. From that humble position, the hopes and needs, the hurts and fears of the other are readily perceived; from that position of humility, love can be offered, and service can be rendered, not with an air of condescension but with the warmth of compassion.

Story is told of Johnny who had a nick name, not to his face, but behind his back. People would refer to him as “I” “We”. Well! We might wonder what kind of an abbreviation is ‘I we’. But then, it’s no abbreviation, it is rather two pronouns put together: “I and we”. And people would say that Johnny could hardly have a sentence that didn’t have the word “I” in it. He might occasionally broaden it to “we”, but it would never ever be “you”.

May be, we could ask ourselves today whether we are in the same condition. And the invitation that Jesus extends to each of us today is this: that we move from ‘I’ to ‘you’, Yes: He asks us to be concerned about the other - the other who needs my compassion, my care and my forgiveness. And our model in humility is: Jesus who was known to be a friend of sinners and tax collectors, Jesus who washed the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper and Jesus who said to His followers: “I have come not to be served, but to serve”. Humility then means living as Jesus lived – not for ourselves, but for others. God bless you all, **Amen.**