Homily, 28 August 2016  
Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Sirach 3:17-18,20,28-29; Psalms 68:4-5,6-7,10-11; Hebrews 12:18-19,22-24a; Luke 14:1,7-14

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The one who humbles himself will be exalted.

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Our first reading begins:

“My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God.”

Ben Sira, a sage and scholar who lived in Jerusalem 200 years before Christ wrote these words to help his fellow Jews make progress in living according to the Law of God.

Therefore, when Jesus told the Pharisees that “the one who humbles himself will be exalted,” he wasn’t telling them something new, but reminding them of something they had already been taught many times and had read for themselves in the scriptures.

So why did they have to be reminded? Why did the Pharisees have so much trouble with humility? Why is humility still a challenge for us today?

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My dictionary says that to be humble is not to be proud or haughty, nor arrogant or assertive. It also means to be deferential or submissive.

Well ... if people thought you were humble because you weren’t proud, or haughty, or arrogant, I’m sure you would be okay with that. But what if they thought you were humble because you were deferential and submissive? That’s not how I want people to think of me.

Yet it is the sense of being submissive that I think best describes the Christian meaning of humility. Let me explain ... 

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In the Christian understanding, humility is a virtue that recognizes that all good comes from God.
It is because of the virtue of humility that we can set aside pride and ambition and turn to God in prayer. It helps us to become obedient, that is submissive, to the will of God.

The word humble is derived from the word *humus*, which means ‘earth.’ “*Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.*” We are not God. We are not God who loves us and cares for us, and knows us better than we know ourselves.

“If you love me,” said Jesus to the apostles, “*keep my commandments.*” And on the day he ascended into heaven he told them to teach those commandments to all who would become his disciples.

Obedience to God, obedience to Christ, means obedience to the teaching authority of the Church: to the great truths of the Gospel handed down from the apostles to their successors -- generation after generation -- to us today.

Humility is hard, but it leads in the end, to human flourishing because all good comes from God.

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So, back to the Gospel ...

Caring for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, caring for anyone who finds themselves without power and at the mercy of others is a very serious commandment. It is second only to the love of God.

I think the Pharisees knew this, but they submitted themselves to the culture, to the system of honor and shame and the order of patronage that was so prevalent in the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean.

Jesus is reminding the Pharisees: humble yourself to the will of God, not to the culture around you.

If it takes dramatic action to learn humility, to learn the habit of loving your neighbor, then do it. Do it even if it seems artificial and calculating at first. Do it over and over and over, until it becomes a habit ... do it until it becomes a virtue.
God is concerned for all aspects of our life. He cares for the whole person. Therefore discipleship is a way of life and we need to work on humbly following the teachings of Christ passed down to us through the Church:

- Teaching on social responsibility and care for the poor,
- Teachings on forgiveness and mercy,
- Teachings on sexuality and marriage,
- Teaching on the stewardship of creation,
- Teaching on the dignity of all human life, from conception to natural death,
- Teachings on worship, on keeping the Sabbath, on receiving the sacraments.

Humility, obedience to the will of God, it’s challenge and I know why Jesus was having such problems with the Pharisees. Some days, it’s why he has trouble with me. I just don't always want to be humble.

I’d like to end today with a prayer for humility. It’s the Suscipe (soo-shee-pay) prayer of St. Ignatius. If you know it, say it with me, if not just listen:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding,  
and my entire will,  
All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.  
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.  
Give me only your love and your grace,  
that is enough for me.

Amen.