

## **Week 22 – Ordinary Time – August 29, 2010**

Last week the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops announced that the revised English translation of the mass will definitely take effect on the First Sunday of Advent next year, so about 15 months from now. The shape and actions of the mass are not changing, but many of the words are. We'll all need to relearn the Gloria and Creed, as well as many of the responses. The words that change the most are in the prayers that the priest reads. One thing I notice: They sound more humble. They remind us what we are doing when we speak up and talk to God. We know God loves us and cares for us, but it is a bold thing to address God at all and to make our requests. Even in our private prayer we sometimes address God the way we make food orders in a drive-through. "Here's what I want. Please have it ready when I get to that side of the building." But we know from our own lives, we are more likely to do things for people who make their request respectfully.

The Book of Sirach today encourages the virtue of humility. If you want people to love you, Sirach says, don't give them gifts, just conduct your affairs with humility. If you think you are great, remember: God is greater than you. God will be happier if you are humbler.

Sirach wrote down the bits of proverbs and wisdom he learned from his grandfather. This would be great for any of us to do: write down what your grandfather taught you and pass it on to the next generation. Sirach's own generation was fascinated with philosophy and science. People thought they could learn the answers to any question as long as they studied it long enough. There is much truth to that, and in our own scientific age we have learned the answers to many things that lay hidden for ages, but we could still take this advice from Sirach: Don't seek out what is too sublime for you, and don't search into things beyond your strength. Have a little humility. People are always wondering why things are the way they are, why other people think the way they do, how and why God made them. We can get somewhere to the answers of these questions, but we still end up with mystery. Sirach would argue, rather than being frustrated with that mystery, take it in, value the mystery of life for what it is. Just because you don't have the answer to every question does not mean life is futile. It probably means life is even richer than you could possibly imagine.

Humility has fallen on hard times. Just listen to talk radio and try to find someone who demonstrates humility. Try to find humility in an election year. Look for it in divorce courts. Listen for it in popular songs. It's hard to find. You can find people trying to teach someone else humility, but that's not the same thing. You will find humility in some advertising and within good families. Humility is the virtue that holds a community together because people look out for one another and sacrifice themselves for the sake of others.

When we practice humility, it brings us into the presence of God, who is far greater than we can imagine. When we listen carefully to an opinion we'd rather not hear, when we help others by

doing work that feels beneath our dignity, and when we pray with honesty, we will experience humility and find favor with God.