

## **Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 31, 2025**

Sometimes I will be in the middle of talking to someone, and I come to the sudden realization that I've been talking way too much about myself. So, I like to say in that situation, "Well, enough about me, what do you think about me?" [laughter] Jesus gives us a good teaching about humility in today's Gospel, including those of famous words, *"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."* It is interesting to me that today's teaching of humility comes right on the heels of last Sunday's exhortation to strive to enter through the narrow gate.

On my first consideration of the two topics side by side it seemed like there was a bit of a contradiction, perhaps. When I hear strive, *"Strive to enter through the narrow gate for many will attempt to enter, but will not be strong enough,"* my thought is 'Hey, I've got it work hard to prove to God that I am worthy enough, that I am strong enough.' That I qualify for eternal life, basically. Striving as the overall feeling or sense of becoming bigger, and stronger and greater, not so much of this sense of becoming smaller, weaker, or lower. But when Jesus spoke of being strong enough to enter through the narrow gate, He was talking about being strong in the things that matter to God. Not strong in self-reliance, self-sufficiency, self-determination, self-righteousness, the esteem of other people. Most of us come into the world with plenty of that to start out with we don't have to strive to increase those. Rather, the striving is not so much about building ourselves up in those kinds of things, as clearing our heart of those.

Clearing our heart of self-reliance, and self-sufficiency, self-focus, self-righteousness, and dependence on the esteem of other people and all the rest. The result of striving is not that we get to the point

where we can look at ourselves and say, "Yeah, we are pretty good." The result is not that we become great in that sense, but that we become little or perhaps, that we acknowledge that and even embrace our littleness for what it is, the capacity of God.

I have told you before about what Jesus said to St. Angela of Foligno. He said, "*You will make to yourself a capacity, and I will make myself a torrent.*" In other words, you make space in your heart for me, and I will fill it to overflowing. That is what we want. That is what we strive for - to empty ourselves of all these different kinds of attachments, especially to self - to make love in space for God to come in and to fill us. There is no contradiction in the end between humility and striving – unless we are striving for the wrong thing. But if we are striving in the spiritual life and growing in our humility, and we are coming to an ever-clearer realization of our own limitations, our own inability to save ourselves and our absolute dependence on God for everything. Everything.

Striving doesn't lead to rejecting and alienating us in our littleness. It leads to accepting and embracing that poverty as the very arena where God wants to come in and accomplish His purposes in us. Striving for humility may seem like an uphill battle. I can't say this of everyone, but I can say this about myself, but as we get older, we tend to get a little more set in our own ways, and we become less tolerant of anything that doesn't fit with our own ways. We can become more attached to our own agendas, our own ways instead of becoming free of those, and detached. Also, our culture highly values self-sufficiency and self-reliance. And it is practically in our DNA inherent in all of human nature and pride comes right along with it. It's all too easy for us to always be asserting ourselves and inserting ourselves and certain situations, maybe from where we don't belong or elevating ourselves over other people. It might

especially be an uphill battle for those who struggle with perfectionism where perhaps the goal is to say, “I'm good. I have got it made. Thanks Lord, I appreciate you, but no need for your call here. I've made it to perfection.” I have probably shared this before but a priest said to me, “Isn't it a shame when you've got perfectionism, but you don't have the skill to back up?” So true, so true.

We can't just expect that humility is going plop into our lap. It's not in our nature for that to happen. We have to work on it. We have to open our hearts to the grace of God to help us grow in humility. I don't know who it was that said this, but I thought it is a good saying: “Humility is not about thinking less of yourself in terms of like hating yourself, rejecting yourself and all of that but thinking of yourself, less. Not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. So, in thinking of other people, one of the ways we have, one of the pieces of wisdom we have from the Saints, is that the way to grow in virtue is to combat the opposing vice and the way to combat vices is to practice the golden virtues. It is not just a matter of going before the Lord and saying, “Lord, help me to grow in humility.” We also want to practice combatting pride. Combating that movement in ourselves that exalts ourselves and elevates ourselves.

What if we got in the practice each day of waking up in the morning and saying “Who would come to me today? How can I do some good for them? Who am I likely to meet today and how can I build them up? How can I help? How can I acknowledge, or will I acknowledge in the other the good that I see? Becoming more outward oriented is part of growing in humility. We are not always thinking first of ourselves but of God and of others. And I think one of the best ways we grow in humility is by receiving Holy Communion worthily and attentively. This great Sacrament in which God Himself has become

so humble, He is intrinsically humble, but He humbles Himself to feed us with His whole body and blood, the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Receiving that Sacrament of such immense humility must also help us to grow in humility ourselves. In the end, Jesus' words are true that *“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”*