

Homily for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Saginaw

I would like to begin with a question today. How many of you want to be holy? It is a serious question. Please raise your hand.

How many of you are seeking holiness in your lives? This is meant to be a reflection question for all of us.

Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* - On The Call To Holiness In Today's World, writes in the very first paragraph of this document, "The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence."¹ "For the Lord has chosen each one of us "to be holy and blameless before him in love" (Eph 1:4)."² "Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church."³ It is also the universal call of each one of us – no one excluded. You and I are the Church. Do we put forth a face of holiness?

Holiness is achievable by each of us, each in our own way. Holiness is not just for the saints. Perhaps we think of saintliness as something we could never achieve and therefore we don't even think about it, or seek to pursue it. But we must remember that saints (big S) were declared saints long after their lived life on earth. Their lives of holiness are the result of their response to the grace of God in their lives and their seeking the will of God in their lives above everything else. It grew out of their relationship with Christ, out of their intimacy with Jesus.

As the Holy Father writes, "The Father's plan is Christ, and ourselves in him. In the end, it is Christ who loves in us, for "holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full". As a result, "the measure of our holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, to the extent that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life on his. Every saint is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people."⁴

Through the sacramental life of the Church – you all have received many of the sacraments – you have received the "riches of Christ". We have to ask ourselves – Are the sacramental graces alive in us? We must ask the Holy Spirit to make them come alive in us. We should daily ask the Holy Spirit to make us holier today than we were yesterday. We should put this prayer put on our bathroom mirrors so we can pray it daily.

Holiness flows out of our ability or perhaps our desire first of all to be able to be little and humble – humility is the basis of every true greatness in the eyes of God.

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* - On The Call To Holiness In Today's World, 1

² Ibid, 2

³ Ibid, 9

⁴ Ibid, 24

In the book of Sirach, we heard his fatherly care with these words, “My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble yourself the more, and you will find favor with God.”⁵

Then Jesus promises that everyone who humble themselves will be exulted.

Humility is not some false sense of worthlessness or thinking poorly of oneself, or a form of low self-esteem, or feeling inferior to others. These descriptions are self-focused and do not give life or bring about new life. As C.S. Lewis said, “*Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.*”

Why is humility important? It is an antidote or cure in this culture of arrogance, narcissism and entitlement. It is the cure for the attitude that we always “need to be right” or the attitude that we always have to have our way. And we all fall into this trap. Does this describe any of us? These attitudes are prevalent in all of us to some degree.

True humility assumes an attitude of attention and docility – the attitude of disciple in front of the one who speaks to us like a father. We grow in it by sitting quietly with our gaze and hearts focused on Jesus in prayer.

Humility opens us to the gifts of God and places us before God, before the greatness of His power because it brings us to our proper place and makes us witnesses of God and of His grace.

Humility is the only ground from which true love can spring. For humility is a giving up of self for something greater and enables us to see ourselves for who we truly are: children created in God’s image and likeness, wounded through sin, yet transformed through Christ’s love. Is this how we see ourselves? This is our truest identity.

Humility keeps us mindful of the gift we have been given in Christ Jesus and it keeps us looking for more. Humility is at the heart of holiness.

We can turn to the saints to teach us the way of humility. And we should. But the most beautiful model for us is Mary, our Blessed Mother. This humble Mother can teach us how to follow her Son, to identify with Christ Jesus so that we are able to be with Him and in Him to experience the glory of the resurrection. Isn’t that what we all want? The glory of the resurrection is meant to be experienced now, in this life, in this moment. It is what we experience in this Eucharist if we are open to it and desiring it.

For Mary, but also for every Christian, humility doesn’t concern self-esteem. It is about her relationship with God, who looked upon his lowly servant because she put herself at the service of the Lord and agreed to what he asked of her, in humble surrender.

She is our model, and yes, we can model her if we choose so. The humility taught and practiced by Mary is the focal point to which God looks and where he seeks to establish a deep and profound relationship each of us. If we desire a deeper relationship with Christ, it begins for us with humility.

⁵ Sirach 3:17-18

“My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble yourself the more, and you will find favor with God.”⁶

True humility leads us to the service of others in charity. Jesus, after he encouraged a life of humility to the guests, then speaks to the owner of the house. “When you hold a lunch or dinner, do not invite your friends or your wealthy neighbors, rather invite the poor.”⁷ In other words, a life of true humility leads us outwards to the service of others, especially to those who cannot repay anything in return. Again, humility is at the heart of holiness.

We cannot grow in holiness without committing ourselves, body and soul, to giving our best to bringing Christ’s kingdom into the world through the way we love others, again, especially those who cannot repay us.

The truth of Jesus’ words on humility is in the fact that He himself lived these words in his own person in support of the will of his Father. In this Eucharist, we receive/experience the humility of Christ, “who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this God greatly exalted him”.⁸

In this Eucharist, Jesus gives himself completely to us, nothing held back – body, blood, soul and divinity – knowing that we could never repay him in return for this greatest gift of all. May the grace we receive here today lead each of us to deeper humility and greater holiness.

⁶ Sirach 3:17-18

⁷ Luke 14:12-13

⁸ Philippians 2:6-8