

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time – February 3, 2008

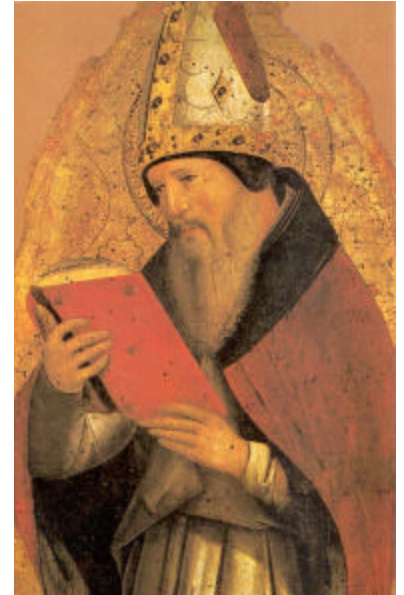
LESSON: God's Favorite Thing: Humility

When St Augustine was asked to name the **three most important virtues**, he gave an interesting answer:

- ✍ First, he said, humility.
- ✍ Second, humility.
- ✍ Third, humility.

Humility is **God's favorite thing**; he **longs** to find it in us. Humility is the **unifying idea** that under girds the eight Beatitudes, which we just heard, and which **summarize** Jesus' teaching about how to live.

Looking carefully, we see a **common denominator**: the person who is **bless-ed** is the person who is **not thinking about himself all the time**.



- ✍ The **poor** in spirit and those who **suffer persecution gracefully** realize that they are not the **center** of the universe - **God is**.
- ✍ The **clean of heart** realizes that other people don't exist just for the sake of **his pleasure**.
- ✍ The **peacemaker** is concerned about the **needs and problems of others**.
- ✍ The **merciful** is concerned about the **suffering** of others.
- ✍ The **mournful** is concerned about the **damage** his sin does to the Church, the world, and other people.
- ✍ The **meek** cares more about **getting things done** than getting **credit** for doing things.
- ✍ Those who **hunger for righteousness** realize that their life has a **higher purpose**, that it's part of a **bigger story**.

Underlying all the Beatitudes is this fundamental **attitude** that that puts God and others ahead of self. It looks **out** at the world instead of staring **in**, fixated on self.

This is **humility**, the bedrock of **basic human maturity**.

- ✍ God loves this humility, because it **opens the soul** to receive his gifts.
- ✍ The **arrogant** soul is **closed in on itself**. No one can get in, not even God, who wants to deliver his gifts.

This is why the **First Reading** shows God praising "the humble and lowly" and exhorting us to "Seek the Lord... seek humility."

ILLUSTRATION: A Humbling Encounter on the Train

Because our secular society doesn't think much of **God**, it also doesn't think much of **humility**. It considers humility a **weakness** and a **hindrance**, instead of the only source of true, lasting spiritual strength. And since we live in this society, sometimes that view **rubs off** on us. But the truth is that **humility** only **adds** to true greatness, it never **subtracts**.



- ✍ There is a **true story** about a **snazzy**, young French businessman traveling by train to Paris, many years ago.
- ✍ He was sharing a compartment with an **old man** who looked like a **peasant** - simple clothes, short hair, and weather-beaten face.
- ✍ The up-and-coming businessman noticed the **rosary** gripped in the old man's hands, and the **devotion** and **concentration** expressed on his face.
- ✍ The young man thought he would have some fun, so he said,
- ✍ *I see that you still believe in that **medieval bunk** about praying your beads. Do you also believe in all the other **myths** the priests try to teach us?*
- ✍ *Yes, indeed*, the old man answered, *Don't you?*
- ✍ *Me? Do I believe in all that ridiculous **superstition**?*
- ✍ The young man laughed out loud. Then he said,
- ✍ *I gave that up in college. And if you want to be smart, you should throw those beads out the window and start studying some real, **scientific truth**.*
- ✍ The old man answered,
- ✍ *I don't understand what you mean. Maybe you could help me.*
- ✍ The young whippersnapper felt he had been a little **harsh**, so he answered,
- ✍ *Well, I could send you some **articles**, if you like. Do you know how to read?*
- ✍ *More or less*, the old man answered.
- ✍ *Good - so where should I send the material?*
- ✍ The old man **fumbled** in his coat pocket and then handed over a **card**.
- ✍ It bore a simple inscription: **Louis** [the "s" is silent] **Pasteur** [pass-TOUR] - **Paris Institute for Scientific Research**.
- ✍ Louis Pasteur was the nineteenth-century **giant of microbiology** who proved the germ-theory of disease and invented the rabies vaccine.



His **humility** certainly didn't hinder his **greatness**.

APPLICATION: Growing in Humility by Going to Confession

As with all virtues, we **grow** in humility by **exercising** it. There is **no better way** to exercise humility than to go to **confession regularly and frequently**. Just this weekend our young people made their first confessions – hopefully the beginning of a life-time of regular and frequent confessions.

Confession makes absolutely **no sense** for the arrogant. The arrogant **deceive** themselves into thinking that if they aren't **axe murderers** or **suicide bombers**, they're really pretty close to being a **saint**.



But the saints are the ones who **use confession the most!** Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta went to confession **every week**.

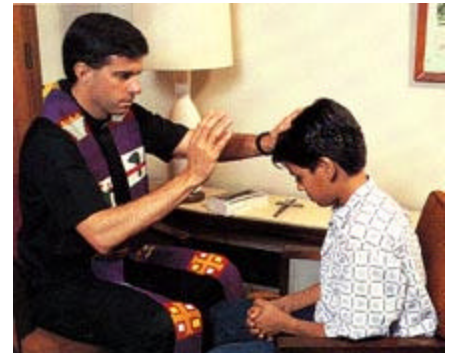
The Bible assures us that even the **righteous** man **stumbles** seven times a day.

In other words, we are all **fallen**, and we are not living life as fruitfully, meaningfully, joyfully, and virtuously as we **should** be.

- ✍ We constantly give into **selfish impulses**.
- ✍ Sometimes we do it **on purpose**, with full consent. Other times we do it out of **weakness** or **confusion**.
- ✍ Sometimes the impulse is relatively **small**, like **telling a little lie** to get someone off our back.
- ✍ Sometimes it's **bigger**, like living inside a **whole web of lies** in order to cover up **ingrained habits of sin**.

God knows that we are **constantly battling against** these impulses,

- ✍ and he instituted the sacrament of confession **for our sake**,
- ✍ to give us an **objective** way to **repent**, to receive his **forgiveness**, and to attain **strength** from his grace to keep **fighting and improving**.



The coming season of Lent is a prime opportunity for each of us to be renewed and celebrate this wonderful Sacrament of healing and forgiveness. Very soon, you'll be receiving the Lenten Calendar which has listed on it the times for confessions during Lent. I've tried to provide as many opportunities as possible so that everyone has the chance to celebrate Confession at least once before Easter. There are always "Primers for Confession" in the pamphlet rack in the entryway.

When we **kneel down** in front of God's representative, the priest, and **confess** our sins and failings,

- ✍ **admitting** that **we are not God** and that we have **done damage** by giving into **self-centered tendencies**,
- ✍ we are giving the virtue of humility a try.

And if we do it **every month**, our humility will quickly **get into shape**, helping us become the wise, patient, joyful, and courageous Christians we were created to be.

During this coming season of Lent, let's resolve to "exercise our humility" and come to God in Confession – seeking His love and His mercy.

