

## **October 23, 2022**

Sir 35:12-14,16-18; 2 Tm 4:6-8,16-18; Lk 18:9-14

*Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.* We can sometimes be put off at the thought of “humbling ourselves,” we are trained to see humility as a weakness. Our culture prizes the one who fights back, who takes charge, who has the skills to overpower. If you want people to listen to what you are saying, then fight your way to the front of the line, win the game, take out your opponent. Our movies glorify the “not so humble” character who uses any means to succeed (John Wayne, Bruce Willis, Jason Sathem, and Sylvester Stallone are not exactly the humble types). We want to hear more from them, we want to know what they think, what they want, what makes them tick. Their voices seem loud to us - so we want to have that volume and prominence - we want to be heard.

But, listen to the first reading: *Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet he hears the cry of the oppressed. ... The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal, nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds.* Who is listening to those who are not strong in the ways of the world? ... God is listening, God cares, God responds. We all some times have been the one on the bottom of the heap - God was there with us. We may have been the one who lost the contest, and other people may not have paid attention - God was listening. When we were unfairly treated and other people didn't seem to care or even notice ... God noticed. We expect that God's response to our cries should be to reverse the situation: to make us the victor, so we can now gloat over the defeat of those who hurt us - that's the way it is in the movies. But often God's response is something different than that - it can be something better than the momentary victory or the pats on the back from others. Often the victories that God grants are the understanding love of close friends and family, the internal recognition that you were in the right and that God knows it (despite what others think), the sense of closeness to God that makes all the other pains fade into the background. We can forget that the greatest victory of all is to attain eternal life, and guide others to do the same. These are the victories that God grants to the lowly.

The Pharisee in the Gospel is speaking out loudly - looking for recognition, looking to be seen as the one who is doing everything right - while looking down on the publican. He pats himself on the back for doing what was required in the law, eager to be seen as a strong one,

thinking that God hears the strong ones and their boasting. But Jesus tells us that the pharisee spoke his prayer *to himself* - it was not reaching the ears of God. The publican recognizes his sinfulness, quietly asks God for help - and that voice is louder to the ears of God than that of the Pharisee! As the prophet said: *The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds.*

Instead of looking down on the lowly as the pharisee did, we should be in their company. Instead of working to be better than them, seek to be in their company. In the company of the unborn child - a model of innocence itself - how vulnerable, how fragile, how defenseless. Secondly, join the elderly or seriously ill. Also fragile and defenseless so dependent upon others for help. Join with the poor who are struggling and the oppressed who are unjustly treated by those in power. Finally join with Our Lord. Who allowed himself to be defenseless, hung on the cross for us, suffered pain, and was at the whim of those who would mock and spit on him. Do we, like the pharisee, build up our superior position over the weak, or do we like the publican move to a more humble position and make ourselves one of them? Instead of searching for the victory of power like Wayne, Willis, Satham and Stallone we should see the victory is in allowing ourselves to become lowly and then with the Lord's help aiding our fellow lowly ones.

Rather than turning loudly to God to demand what we be lifted higher, can we call out to God from our own lowliness. Trading our own self-interest and needs for power and recognition for some humility. Not only looking for our interests, but standing beside the weak and vulnerable, being humble enough allow ourselves to be ridiculed for doing so- sharing in the Lord's victory over injustice, not a personal victory for ourselves. On dark days, in the face of what seems to be impossible conditions, we must have the faith to know that the Lord provides many helps to the humble that we may not be aware of, things that can only be known through praying the prayer of the publican and felt in the deepest place of our hearts. We must also have faith that the Lord has the ultimate power - that one day, here or in the life hereafter, God will be the ultimate "equalizer" who will finally and definitively secure justice for the weak - maybe its best to be one of them. It is the humble heart that God reaches out to and lifts to victory, while the heart filled with pride and self interest is left to its own powers (that it is so proud of) - powers that will ultimately be overwhelmed without God's assistance. As Jesus says today - *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*