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Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13
Psalm 146
1 Corinthians 1:26-31
Matthew 5:1-12a
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 1, 2026

It has been roughly twenty-five years since Betty, and I were in the deacon formation program of the Diocese of Fort Worth. I said “Betty and I” to call attention to the fact that as the men in my class journeyed toward ordination over a six-plus-year period, our wives were with us every step of the way. It is well known that the Catholic Church does not ordain women, but some married deacons have come to understand that our wives would have made the better deacons. That is certainly true for me. One assignment from our time of formation that stands out for me to this day was a requirement to identify a favorite teaching from Holy Scripture. For me, it was easy to narrow the selection down to two. One is Micah chapter 6, verse 8, which says the Lord requires only that we act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God. The other is Matthew chapter 5, verses 1-12, the Beatitudes, which we just heard in today’s Gospel. The virtue of humility runs deeply through both Scriptural passages as it does through all of our readings today. It makes me wonder, then, why we hear so little about humility in religious education, in religious media, or even from the pulpit. Could it be that Christianity has deferred to the narcissism that seems to be normalized in our society today? Instead of taking on the mantle of humility from Holy Scripture, too many of us seem to have taken on the mantle of vanity from our culture. The singer/songwriter Mac Davis sang about that as far back as the 1980’s. Some of you may remember, “O, Lord, it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way.”

But it’s not hard to be humble, even if we are perfect, or think we are. In fact, whenever we

fail to act humbly on our own accord, life tends to do it for us. Some of the most vivid memories in my life are the result of experiences that humbled me. It started early. As a child, I had difficulty keeping still during Mass. More than once, upon returning home on Sunday afternoons from church and from breakfast with my grandparents, I had to kneel in front of a door without moving and with my nose pressed firmly against the doorknob. It felt like I was there for hours, but I am sure it was only for a few minutes. I learned to be still from that, and I also learned something about humility. Fast forward to my college years. Late one Saturday night a friend and I were on the phone with some girls in a nearby dorm. The girls said they were hungry, and since their dorm was locked down for the night, we offered to buy burgers and deliver them. All doors were locked from both sides, so we took the burgers to a first-floor window. My friend and I were quite proud of our chivalry until the campus police drove by and saw us. An officer took our IDs and told us we could retrieve them from the dean of men on Monday. Another lesson in humility. I have many, but our time is limited, so just one more. This one took place on this altar shortly after my ordination. I was assisting Bishop Vann at Mass when my stole slipped off my shoulder. You might call it a wardrobe malfunction though it was not nearly as dramatic as the one that happened to Janet Jackson during her 2004 super bowl halftime performance. I was oblivious to what had happened to me until the bishop calmly paused his Eucharistic prayer, slipped the stole back over my shoulder, and then

continued. My face must have turned as red as the carpet. A third lesson in humility.

These lessons are different, however, from the teachings about humility that we read in Holy Scripture from the prophets, from Saint Paul, and from Jesus. They call us to act humbly before life does it for us. In today's first reading, the prophet Zephaniah paints a portrait of a life well-lived, a life characterized by simplicity, humility, honesty, peace, and a meaningful relationship with the Lord. Jesus continues to paint that portrait in the Beatitudes, though he does not explicitly use the word humility. Instead, he gives us eight powerful expressions of littleness that lead to blessedness – blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the clean of heart, blessed are the peacemakers, and blessed are they who are persecuted. Then he makes it personal and direct – blessed are you, he said, when you are little. Rejoice and be glad. Your reward will be great. Our second reading was taken from Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul founded the Christian community in the city of Corinth during his second missionary journey. But while in Ephesus on his third journey, Paul began to hear troubling news from Corinth. The community was fracturing, and rivalries were growing. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Paul confronted these problems in his letter. Last week we heard him call for the people to unite in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And today, we heard him address what he must have felt was an underlying cause of their polarization – vanity. In typical Saint Paul fashion, he repeats and emphasizes the lessons of Jesus' Beatitudes – “God chose the foolish...to shame the wise,” “God chose the weak...to shame the strong,” and “God chose the lowly and despised...to reduce to nothing those who are something.”

The message of today's readings could not be clearer. Humility is a foundational virtue of our faith. It is much more than simply being nice. It is what God expects of us. Sure, we stumble from time to time. God knows we're not perfect. But we can all strive to do better and to emulate the last line of that Mac Davis song, “We're doing the best that we can.”