

## Homily: March 9, 2024

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

As we continue our Lenten journey, we celebrate our God who helps us through his son, Jesus, to become meek and humble as he is. We struggle with the old Adam and Eve in us, making genuine humility a challenge for us. So we entrust ourselves to our compassionate God, calling out: Kyrie eleison!

In the Gospel we saw a classic example of a person full of pride—a braggart, even in his prayer, during which he praised himself before God. My grandmother from Germany used to say, “Eigenlob stinkt” (Pride or self-praise stinks). The deeper problem we are not always aware of about such pride is this: When we perceive ourselves as better than others, we plant the seed of hatred. Why? Once I consider myself to be “higher” and “better” than others and enjoy the feel of that status, I must guarantee my lofty position by putting others lower and less than myself. I begin to look down upon others. I wear some mask of greatness. Other people quickly feel such a haughty attitude and find it repulsive. It causes a distancing—a subtle form of hatred.

It is quite the opposite if we can take the stance of the tax collector. Then we recognize ourselves as flawed human beings—even sinful human beings. Our Pope Francis modeled that humble stance for us at the beginning of his ministry by identifying himself vocally as a sinner. Such admittance is a major step into humility. People—we-- quickly sense genuine humility in a person who is unpretentious and meek. The more we are humble, the more you and I can create a bond of fraternity and openness to others, all of whom are flawed and sinful human sisters and brothers.

I invite you and me to take a few moments to recall one or two of the most humble and meek persons we know, either directly or other figures we have heard about.

Or you may recall a time when you most felt like the genuinely humble and regretful tax collector.

When did you and I most keenly feel our limitedness and powerlessness over many situations, especially over other people? Did you feel a painful sense of regret at how little you could do or even how poorly you did something? Did that regretful sense eventually usher in a comparable deep sense of trust that God’s grace and presence were all the more abundant when we were weak and sinful?

The humbler we become, the more we can trust that God is winning out despite our (humanity’s) thirst for power, control, material, self-glory, and revenge.

Jesus said, “All who exalt themselves will be humbled (*will fall on their face*).”