

Reflection for the 5th Sunday of Ordinary Time

This Sunday in our First, Second and Gospel Readings we hear of the Prophet Isaiah, St. Paul and St. Peter all expressing a sense of unworthiness that could be described as humility. In the case of the Prophet Isaiah and St. Peter this expression of humility is at the start of their ministry or calling to ministry. St. Paul is reflecting on the fact that from the start of his ministry as a follower of Christ he knew he was not worthy of being called to serve Jesus Christ. The Prophet and the two Saints this Sunday provide us with an opportunity to reflect on humility as a virtue. Humility is not one of the Cardinal Virtues, Justice, Temperance, Fortitude, and Prudence. But Humility is mentioned in Sacred Scriptures and by many Theologians of the Church as a virtue.

Before we go much further looking into humility as a virtue it might be best to define humility. The Catholic Encyclopedia defines humility as “signifying lowliness, submissiveness and it is derived from the Latin *humilitas* or, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, from *humus*, the earth which is beneath us.” Humility in a higher and ethical sense is that by which a human has a modest estimate of his or her own worth and submits himself or herself to others. This definition of humility is not very appealing and may cause us to ponder if humility is a virtue worth seeking. It is important to note that humility is seen by many as the foundation for all other virtues. It is with humility that we can start on the path toward holiness. It is through the virtue of humility that the mind is restrained from thinking that one’s ideas and self is greater than God. Humility enables one to accept our impoverished dependence upon God. Embracing humility enables us to accept our impoverishment and subsequently helps us to give ourselves over to God. It is with God’s grace that we can become who we are meant to be, under our own power and control we will always come up short of who we are called to be.

It is in our Gospel Reading this Sunday where we hear Jesus responding to St. Peter’s feeling of inadequacies, saying to the future Saint, “Do not be afraid.” This is what Jesus Christ choose to say to St. Peter when he is expressing his uncertainty and his humility. Jesus does not challenge St. Peter for his lack of faith, rather He just informs him to have no fear, to be not afraid. Jesus is not questioning if St. Peter has enough faith or if he is willing to follow Him, Jesus is just informing St. Peter what he needs to do to follow Him and that is to have no fear, to trust in God.

For many of us in the year 2025, when we hear the words that Jesus spoke to St. Peter “Do not be afraid,” we might find ourselves thinking about St. John Paul II, and what he said over 46 years ago. On October 22, 1978, Pope St. John Paul II, the newly elected Vicar of Christ, looked out at the throng gathered in St. Peter’s Square for his inaugural Mass and said, “Be not afraid.” These words would become a familiar refrain in his papacy. For the nearly three decades that Pope St. John Paul II led the Catholic Church, his bold proclamation of faith loomed larger than life. He was a vibrant witness in a world battered by a century of global wars and genocides. He led the Church with joy and courage never wavering, never losing hope for he trusted in Christ. So, in his first homily of his papacy, he saw the cultural despair of a post-Christian world and shared the same message that Jesus shared with St. Peter two thousand years before him, “Be not afraid.”

Be it the Prophet Isaiah, St. Paul, St. Peter, the crowds in St. Peter’s Square in 1978, or you and I in Church in 2025, the words that Jesus spoke on the boat, “Do not be afraid,” are words that are appropriate for all of us to hear and embrace.

As we look at the Prophet Isaiah, St. Paul and St. Peter we see three persons that when they encounter God, they look within themselves and take stock of who they truly are and all three of them found themselves wanting. It is in their lacking that they are able to find humility and reach out to God to find wholeness. Without the humility that these three men express today in our readings they would not be the

Prophet or the Saints that we honor and are inspired by today. These holy men of God did not find their holiness in their deeds and actions, but rather in seeing who they truly are and then in humility relying on God.

The self-awareness that the Prophet Isaiah, St. Paul and St. Peter express today in our readings, is a road map for us to follow. They are showing us how to embrace humility so that we can with God's grace embrace holiness. In our journey in this world, we will always come up short if we don't embrace humility. As we embrace humility we can start our journey toward holiness. Pope St. John Paul II, in his lifetime, defied the Nazis, and work tirelessly against the evils of Communism, his source of strength was his relationship with Jesus Christ, and he had no fear. So, in 1978 as the world was in the grips of the Cold War, with the risk of nuclear annihilation, Pope St. John Paul II shared with the crowds in St. Peter's Square what Jesus shared with St. Peter two thousand years earlier, "Be not Afraid."