

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

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The Word of God today gently but firmly draws our attention to a virtue that lies at the very heart of Christian life: humility.

The prophet Zephaniah cries out: “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth... seek humility; perhaps you may be sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger.” Later, he promises that God Himself will live in the midst of His people “a humble and lowly people, who shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord.”

Humility is not weakness. This is God’s chosen dwelling place. The word *humility* comes from the Latin *humus*, meaning soil, earth, and ground. To be humble, then, is to be down to earth; to stand in truth, rooted in reality, knowing who we are before God. Humility is not thinking less of ourselves: it is thinking of ourselves rightly. We are creatures; loved, gifted, redeemed, but not self-made. That is why humility is so essential. When we are grounded, God can build upon us. When we forget the ground from which we had come, we begin to float in illusion.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus sits on the mountain and opens His mouth to teach. The very first word of His sermon is not a command, not a warning, but a blessing: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” This is not accidental. Humility is the foundation of all the Beatitudes. Without it, none of the others can stand. Mercy, meekness, purity of heart, and peacemaking, all grow only in humble soil. A proud heart has no space. Only a humble heart has room for God.

St. Paul echoes this truth when he reminds the Corinthians: “Consider your own call... not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful.” God deliberately chooses the small, weak, and the despised not to shame us, but to save us from pride. Paul makes it clear: “Whoever boasts, must boast in the Lord.”



Here we encounter an important distinction: the two kinds of boasting.

There is *sinful boasting*, rooted in pride. This is when we lift ourselves up, take credit for what is God's gift, and compare ourselves with others. This kind of boasting is opposed to truth and suffocates grace.

Then there is *holy boasting* that glorifies the Lord. This kind of boasting points away from one's self and toward God. It says, "Look what the Lord has done!" It is humility rejoicing in grace.

Where humility is absent, pride quickly takes over. And with *pride*, as the Church teaches, it is the foundation of all deadly sins. Pride kills grace. Humility, on the other hand, allows grace to flourish. God resists the proud, but He pours Himself generously into the humble heart. We see this powerfully in the life of St. John Mary Vianney, the Curé of Ars.

Despite his worldwide fame as a confessor and spiritual guide, St. John Vianney saw himself as nothing more than, in his own words, a "poor potato eater". In life, he never sought recognition, and it was precisely this humility that terrified Satan. Pride cannot stand humility, because humility leaves no foothold for evil. St. John Vianney said: "Humility is as necessary as Baptism; as necessary as the Sacrament of Penance after mortal sin. It gives such great merit to all our actions and adorns so abundantly all our good works."

Pope Francis, reflecting deeply on humility, especially in his teaching in May 2024, reminds us that humility is the base of Christian life. He described it as the greatest antagonist of pride, the sin that distorts everything. Pride inflates the heart and makes us appear more than we are. Humility restores us to the truth: that we are wonderful creatures, yes—but limited, fragile, and in constant need of mercy.

Humility saves us from pretending. It allows us to receive. It teaches us to kneel, not because we are worthless, but because God is great. St. Augustine puts it in this manner, in no uncertain terms: “If you ask me which is the first virtue for a Christian, I will tell you it is humility. If you ask me which is the second? It is humility. If you ask me which is the third? It is still humility.”

Brothers and sisters, today the Lord invites us to return to the ground: to the humus from which true holiness grows. Let us ask for the grace to be poor in spirit, gentle in heart, honest before God. When we are humble, God Himself becomes our strength.

May we seek humility, live humility, and allow God to do great things in us—not for our glory, but for His. Amen.