

Homily 21st Sunday Year C 2022

Being grateful for everything received and having the ability to reach out and use our gifts for others avoids questions of being worthy or unworthy, who gets in or who's left out etc. We all aspire to holiness or to be the best we can be for God and for others.

There's a Jewish story about a young man who aspired to great holiness. After working at this for some time, he went to his Rabbi.

"Rabbi," he announced, "I think I have achieved sanctity."

"Why do you think that?" asked the Rabbi.

"Well," responded the young man, "I've been practising virtue and discipline for some time and have grown quite proficient at them. Throughout the while day, I take no food or water. I do all I do all kinds of hard work for others and I never expect to be thanked.

"If I have temptations of the flesh, I roll in the snow or in thorn bushes until they go away, and then at night, before bed, I practice the ancient monastic discipline and administer lashes to my bare back. I have disciplined myself to become holy."

The Rabbi was silent for a time. Then he took the young man by the arm and led him to a window and pointed to an old horse which was just being led away by its master.

"I have been observing that horse for some time," the Rabbi said, "and I've noticed that it isn't get fed or watered from morning to night. All day long it has work for people and is never ever thanked. I often see it rolling around in snow or in bushes, as horses are prone to do, and frequently I see it being whipped.

"But I ask you: Is that a saint or a horse?"

To be holy is to be motivated by gratitude, nothing more and nothing less. Scripture often makes this point. The sin of Adam and Eve was primarily a failure in receptivity and gratitude. God gives them life, gave them each other and the garden. He only asked that they receive them gratefully.

To receive with gratitude, to be truly thankful, is one of the greatest religious attitudes. In fact, it defines sanctity. Saints are people who are grateful, people who see and receive everything as gift.

Forgetting to be grateful often lies at the root of our troubles. Taking what we have as if we are owed it all, lies at the root of many of our deepest resentments towards others and their resentments towards us. Invariably when we are angry at someone, especially those closest to us, is precisely why we are not appreciated (that is, thanked) properly. Conversely, I suspect, more than a few people harbour resentments towards us because we, consciously or unconsciously, think that it is their job to take care of us.

If, like Adam and Eve we take, as if it is ours by right, what can only be received gratefully as gift, we can never be truly loving. Ingratitude is the original sin.

A very poor old woman with a small family called a radio station asking for help from God.

A non-believer also listening to the program decided to make fun of the woman.

He found out her address, called his secretary and ordered her to buy a large number of foodstuffs and take them to the woman. However, he sent it with the following instruction:

"When the woman asks who sent the food, tell her that it's from the devil."

When the secretary arrived at the woman's house, the woman was so happy and grateful for the help that had been received. She started putting the food inside her small house.

The Secretary then asked her, "Don't you want to know who sent the food?"

The woman replied,

"No! Say thanks to whoever sent this! I don't care who the person is because when GOD orders, even the devil obeys!"