

Homily for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
St. Thomas the Apostle Parish – West Springfield, Massachusetts
September 1, 2019



Scripture Readings: Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29 ✕ Psalm 68 ✕ Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a ✕ Luke 14:1, 7-14

Several years ago, the St. Petersburg Times ran a story about the legendary Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula. He was on vacation with his family in a small town in northern Maine.

One afternoon it was raining and Coach Shula, his wife, and their five children went to a matinee movie in the town's only theater. When they arrived, the house lights were still on and Coach Shula could see that there was only a handful of people there. When he and his family walked in, everyone stood up and cheered.

As he sat down, Coach Shula turned to his wife and said, "We're about fifteen hundred miles from home and their giving me a standing ovation. They must get the Dolphins on TV all the way up here."

Then a man approached him and, with a huge smile, shook his hand. Shula beamed and asked, "How did you recognize me?" The man replied, "Mister, I have no idea who you are. All I know is that just before you and your family walked in, the manager told us he wouldn't show the movie today unless four more people showed up."

That story clarifies the teaching of today's readings that our Christian commitment calls us to be humble; it calls us to be the kind of Christian that Don Shula revealed himself to be in sharing that story.

Here was a man whose reputation extended across the country, not only as an excellent coach but also as a truly good person. It was only natural for him to think that the man who came over to him knew who he was. When it turned out that he didn't, Coach Shula was the first to laugh at himself. In fact, he enjoyed the incident so much that he shared it with others. Only a truly humble person would do a thing like that.

This raises an important question for us: What exactly is humility? Does it mean that we put ourselves down? Does it mean that we think little of ourselves? Does it mean that we deny our true worth?

Humility doesn't mean any of these things. Humility is something more profound and far more beautiful than that. Humility isn't thinking little of ourselves; it's not thinking of ourselves at all. In its most profound and beautiful sense, humility means to be like Jesus who said in Matthew's Gospel, "Learn

from me, for I am meek and humble of heart."¹ It means to be like Jesus who said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve."²



Humility means to live as Jesus lived — not for ourselves, but for others. It means to use our talents as Jesus used His talents — not for ourselves and our own glory, but for others and their *needs*.

There is a story about three people who were having a conversation about recent translations of the Bible. The first person said, "I like the New American Bible that we use at Mass. The language is so much easier to understand without sacrificing the sacredness of God's Word."

The second person said, "I like the translation of the Jerusalem Bible because it is very poetic without sacrificing the meaning of God's Word."

The third person said, "I like my mother's translation of the Bible. She has translated the Bible into life and made it live by her example. Her translation is the best one of all."

That story sums up the challenge of Jesus in today's Gospel. Jesus challenges us to translate God's Word into everyday life. He challenges us to live the Bible — to make the Bible live — to use our talents and gifts, again, not for ourselves and our own glory, but for others and their needs. This is how we are to be of humble service as was Jesus Christ.

I would like close with St. Ignatius' Prayer for Generosity:

"LORD, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labor and not to ask for reward,
except to know
that I am doing your will." ³✕

¹ [Matthew 11:29](#)

² [Matthew 20:28](#)

³ [Loyola Press](#)