

Session 2

LIVE HUMBLY

Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.

Matthew 20:27-28a

GATHERING PRAYER

God leads the humble in what is right
and teaches them God's way.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness
for those who keep God's covenant and decrees.

Psalm 25:9-10

REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE

Once there was a monastery where the monks did not enjoy living together. Brother John was a grump, Brother James always picky, and Thomas too bossy. Their prayer life

became a burden. People stopped coming for spiritual direction. Men stopped entering their community.

The abbot called the monks together and told them that he was going to visit the rabbi to see what could be done to make their life better again as a community. When the abbot came to the rabbi's door, the rabbi invited him in for a meal. The abbot told how little the monks enjoyed each other or prayed together, how diminished their community life had become. He wanted to know what to do. The rabbi listened and listened and finally said, "The Messiah is among you."

The abbot waited, but the rabbi gave only this message. The abbot returned to the monastery, gathered the monks together, and told them what the rabbi said. "The Messiah is among you." The monks began to ask each other, "Could Brother John, the grumpy one, be the Messiah? Or, picky Brother James? Or even Brother Thomas?"

The monks began to look at each other differently and treat each other better. They shared what they received, listened to each other, and helped each other. The environment in the monastery changed. People began coming to the monastery for spiritual direction. Young men asked to join the community again.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- ❖ When have you experienced community?
- ❖ What in these experiences gives you a sense of community?
- ❖ When have you experienced community in the Church?

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him.

Jesus said to her, “What do you want?”

She said to him, “Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.”

When the others heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”

Matthew 20:20-21, 24-28a

The mother of James and John creates a rupture among Jesus’ disciples when she seeks prestige and honor for her sons. Jesus reminds his disciples that greatness consists in service to others, not in prestigious positions. In his words and example Jesus shows us the meaning of being servant. “Learn from me,” he says, “for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29).

Jesus’ disciples return to the topic of greatness later in Matthew’s gospel. “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” they ask. This time Jesus answers by bringing a child into their midst and cautioning that they must become like children. “Whoever becomes humble like this child is

the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:1-5). Jesus teaches his disciples that to follow God’s way is to serve one another, not to seek status and power.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Choose one or more.

- ❖ Describe a community modeled on Jesus’ idea of servant.
- ❖ What would the Church be like as a community of equals?
- ❖ What contradictions have you experienced or observed in being a servant kind of leader?
- ❖ What consequences might a servant leader experience in the business world?

SCRIPTURE AND FRANCIS OF ASSISI

The turning point in Francis’ life occurs when he encounters a leper, dismounts his horse, and kisses the leper’s wounds. Francis sees Christ in the leper. He leaves his secure life, lives with the poor, and ministers to their needs.

Francis’ way of life is to follow Christ’s example of humility, just as the apostle Paul urges the Philippians. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves,” Paul writes. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:3, 5-8).

For the Friar Minors, humble service is basic to life in community with each other. *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* include a story about the power of humility. Three well-known robbers came to the door of the Franciscan friars and asked Brother Angelo for something to eat. Brother Angelo refused to give them anything, because they had stolen from others.

Later, Brother Angelo told Francis what he had done, hoping to receive affirmation. Instead, Francis reprimanded Angelo for his lack of charity in Christ’s name, saying, “You acted in a cruel way because sinners are led back to God by holy meekness more so than by cruel scolding.”

Angelo was told to find the robbers, to kneel down and humbly ask forgiveness. The effect of Angelo’s actions brought the robbers to change and ask to join the community.*

Humility is not inferiority, nor passivity, nor acceptance of being put down. Humility acts with compassion. Humble people are present and attentive to others and put others before themselves. Humble people are inclusive and interact in mutuality with others. Humility is basic in community. To give service necessitates humility. “Littleness” or “minority” is an absolute requirement to enter the kingdom of God. It is to such as little children that the kingdom belongs (Matthew 19:14).

* *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, 1360-62.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Choose one or more.

- ❖ What do you find attractive about living humbly?
- ❖ What are the struggles in living a humble life?
- ❖ How do these reflections on humility and minority affect how you look at relationships in your family? At work? In the civic community? In government policies?
- ❖ When have you experienced or witnessed an humble action?
- ❖ Who do you regard as humble? What makes this person's life attractive or unattractive?
- ❖ How do our relationships with God and one another change when we no longer need to control or to dominate? When we no longer strive to have power over others? When we no longer want to compete?

GOSPEL LIVING

Relationships are the heart of the Gospel. Relationships with friends, family members, neighbors, colleagues, associates—all people—challenge us to have humble hearts. Reflect on how you can live humbly as Jesus and Francis do. Make a commitment to act on one or more of the suggestions below. Share your intention with the group. Share how you are living your commitment when you gather again.

During your week at work or with family and friends, what can you do to—

- ❖ Let go of a need to control.
- ❖ Take time to listen.
- ❖ Spend time with someone who is lonely.
- ❖ Play and not compete.
- ❖ Send a letter to someone who needs a friend.
- ❖ Visit the sick.
- ❖ Help at a shelter.
- ❖ Volunteer to those in need.
- ❖ Think *we*, not just *me*.

PRAYER

As we close our gathering, we pause to bless each other and remember our role as servants in our family, our neighborhood, our work, and the events in our daily lives. To bless someone is to extend God's love and care. To bless someone, you can improvise a blessing in your own words, such as: "May the Lord give you peace in your heart as you deal with your work situation. I promise you my prayers and support." Or, you can extend to one another a more traditional blessing, such as, "I bless you in the name of the Lord, or "May the Lord bless you and keep you." Francis of Assisi used the blessing from the book of Numbers 6:24-26.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine upon you.

The Lord be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you kindly.

The Lord fill you with peace.