

Homily for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

(Scriptures for today's liturgy)

I'm sure you know of the 33 miners who are trapped a half-mile underground in a gold and copper mine in Chile. In the most literal sense, these men have been "humbled."

Humility, the virtue urged on us in the first scripture today and in Jesus' parable about the seating plan for a wedding reception, - the word humility is rooted in the Latin *humus* which means, simply, earth - the ground beneath our feet.

To be humble is to be low, close to the earth. The Chilean miners are a half-mile deep into the ground, literally "humbled" by the collapse of the main shaft in the desert mountain where they were working.

Some of us may have had experiences in our lives, not as dramatic as in Chile, when we've been humbled, *grounded*, by our own doing or by circumstances beyond our control.

But what's of note in the scriptures here is that we're being counseled, invited, urged to be humble, to *become* humble - even to humble ourselves.

And something may seem counter-intuitive in all that.

Aren't we supposed to do our best, build ourselves up, make the most of who we are and what we have and of what we can offer to others? Of course we are!

But one can do all of that -- and still be humble.

The problem comes when success and prestige (or the desire for same) lead me to forget that I am a creature of God and that God, as the book of Genesis describes it, sculpted humankind out of the clay of the ground: the *humus*, the soil of our humble, human beginning.

Some of us are old enough to recall the words the priest used to say when imposing ashes on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday: *Remember that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return...* (The dust of the *humus*, the clay, from which we were made and to which we will all one day return...)

True humility is not walking around with my dead drooping.
Humility is seeking and accepting my place (whatever it might be),
not in terms of society and prestige,
but rather my place as I stand before God.

This past week [on my blog](#) I invited my readers to comment
on how they understood this notion of humility.

Here's the response of a reader who signed only as JW:

Humility for me is being in the most right place!

Sometimes the shock of it can surprise me,

but once I put my defenses down,

realize it is from God and for my own good,

I see it for the gift it is and the peace it brings.

As a follower of Christ it is what I strive for!

For JW, humility is seeking and accepting the place
which is right in the eyes of God -

even and especially if you've got your eyes on some other place.

To be humble, to humble myself, is to recognize:
that God is the Creator and I'm the creature;
that this is God's world and I'm only passing through;
that in the end, God will look not to how high I climbed
but to how well I accepted and shared
the humble reality of who, in truth, I am.

JW's words remind me of the old Shaker tune, *Simple Gifts*:

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,

'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,

And when we find ourselves in the place just right,

'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gain'd,

To bow and to bend we won't be asham'd,

To turn, turn will be our delight,

Till by turning, turning we come round right.

The song might easily be retitled, *'Tis the Gift to Be Humble*,
but don't let the simple tune and the beautiful words fool you!

We Christians have a model for humbling ourselves,
we have a model for bowing and bending without shame,
close to the earth from which we were made.

And our model is Jesus.

Is there any better image of humility
than the image of Christ on his Cross?

Divinity humbled to humanity in Jesus,

"who humbled himself
becoming obedient even to death on a cross."
(Phil 2:6-8)

The entrapped Chilean miners have sent up word
that they want to erect a small shrine for prayer,
a half-mile down into the earth,
and the rescue team has lowered a Crucifix to them:
the image of the one who humbled himself for their sakes
and who, like them, was entombed in the earth.

To humble ourselves is to bend low enough
to discover the presence of God right where we are -
even when that's not the place we want to be -
and therein, to find peace.

Christ rose from the depths of his tomb
and we pray for the survival and rescue of the miners.

We do this at the table Christ left us
on the night before he was humbled to death on a Cross.

He gave us the sacrifice of his love
in the gift of his Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

Let us bend and bow low before the Lord
who offers himself to us on this altar
in the sacrament of his peace.

- *Rev. Austin Fleming*