

HOMILY 29 AUG 2010 HT-W/XII-PC

One of the most challenging events in life is getting a new job. And as much as you might think a man with my sort of job security can't sympathize, guess again. For every several years a priest must undergo the transition to a new assignment. And new assignment means new job. A man has to learn to work with a new staff in an unfamiliar office in a different community. He has to adapt to living in a new rectory. The priest must learn to work with new councils and committees. And of course there are the hundreds, if not thousands, of new families, meaning that a network of parochial relationships has to be built up from scratch.

What is particularly vexing about this sort of transition is the feeling that one must basically begin anew. For me, the transition from my previous assignment in Rome was especially stressful. I had never been a pastor. 4 years of academic studies had intervened between my previous parochial office and the current one, so even the routine sacerdotal tasks had become a bit alien to me. I remember sitting one night in the rectory in a rather despondent mood, thinking something like: I went to a foreign country, learned a new language, wrote a 300 page dissertation, and obtained a doctorate in sacred theology from a pontifical university—but I can't even remember which end of the baby to baptize. Yes, a man or woman in a new job is apt to suffer that sinking feeling that nothing which has been done before counts for anything. No matter how much previous labor has exacted by way of sacrifices and suffering, no matter how much knowledge and skill past experience has granted, it amounts to zero in the new office. One must start again from square one. This is hard. It is hard, because it requires a willingness to learn, and this willingness demands humility. And as much as our sacred tradition lauds the virtue of humility, acclaiming it as the mother of all virtues, it doesn't come easily.

Learning is hard because humility is hard; and it gets harder as we grow older. You see, my dear people, we like to think as we get older that we grow wiser, that we have been to school, graduated, and have come of age, and so we don't need to go back to the classroom, because life experiences have taught us all the important stuff. And so it seems an impossible endeavor to become the student once again, to sit at the desk and listen and ask questions. It's oh so difficult to admit our ignorance, because it wounds our pride ever so deeply. It's akin to becoming a little child eager to learn a new lesson. And yet we remember who said that those who become like little children shall enter the kingdom of God.

In the gospel selection today, the Lord counsels his listeners to be humble, to seek the lowest place at the banquet table. And so we shouldn't be reluctant to humble ourselves, to admit the limitations of our knowledge and our need for instruction. Indeed the Lord Jesus is no arrogant pedagogue, unfamiliar and unsympathetic w/ our plight; he invites us to learn from him who is meek and humble of heart, from one who knows our sorrows and pains. For in humility we encounter the one who humbled himself to accept death on a cross. We who humble ourselves learn from him the most crucial of lessons; for we open our hearts to the beautiful, incomprehensible mystery of God, and we come to share in the exaltation of his resurrection.

In our parishes, a golden opportunity for learning will be presented once again this fall. Our AFF Team will be sponsoring 2 different programs for adult education. One is the Great Catholic Answers for adults. This is a type of apologetics course in which one learns how to

explain and, as necessary, to defend the teachings of our Catholic Church in discussions with other Christians. Since we Catholics are a minority in this corner of the world, this is valuable knowledge that will make us more secure in our faith and allow us to help other Christians understand us better. The second offering is a study of the Gospel of Matthew. This study comes at an opportune time, for in just a few months, we will be hearing from Matthew every Sunday for a whole liturgical year. His gospel, sometimes called the catechist's gospel, was written for the very purpose of catechesis, that is, helping its readers lead others to a fuller encounter with Jesus Christ. If we are willing to humble ourselves, register, and learn from these offerings, we'll get to know the Lord better and make him more a part of our lives.