

31A SML 2017
MT 23:1-12

One of the celebrated portrait artists of the world once said that he never knew a person to sit for a portrait who did not constantly talk about himself. This may be explained psychologically as a desire to impress the artist with his greatness, in order that the artist might translate it onto the canvas. But it is more likely that the habit of egotism was already so deeply encrusted that self-praise was rather automatic, it showed itself on the NFL field as well as in the studio.

Rich men perhaps more than others are sometimes, but not all the time, the greatest boasters, though it may be unconscious. Confusing having with being, they think that since they possess material greatness, they must necessarily be great. Last spring, I was walking back to the Rectory after the Mass. and a parishioner driving a Cadillac was driving through with his window down; he stopped and I commented on his nice car, and he widened his phylactery and lengthened his tassels by going on to brag about his cashmere sweater and his Rolex watch. His boasting left such a bad taste in my mouth, when I got to my office, I looked up what he gives at

Mass on Sunday, and the bad taste became worse, his weekly gift is just over what my father put in the collection in 1970.

Driving a Cadillac, wearing cashmere and a Rolex, he puts the heavy burden of financing this parish on everyone else's shoulders, while barely lifting a finger himself.

Another parishioner remarked to me that with all the "stuff" that St. Mary of the Lakes is collecting, it certainly makes our entrance ways messy. I said, "God's work is messy." But she didn't offer to tidy up. She didn't offer to lift a finger. She just thought she did her part by telling me how messy the entrance was.

Such proud people are much more subject to worry and anxiety than those who are not proud, for every Rolex watch or lack thereof, every cashmere sweater or lack thereof, every "mess," registers very sharply through their sensitive skin.

Nothing has so much contributed to egotism, pride, conceit, swell-headedness and bragging, as the assumption that an "inferiority complex" is always wrong. If the failure to assert oneself, to push other aside in seeking the first place at table, is the mark of a psychic disease, then satanic pride is on the throne.

✓ Depreciating the efforts of others,

- ✓ an excessive tenderness about personal insults and callousness toward the feelings of others

become the daily routine. That is a Pharisee and Jesus had no time for Pharisees.

The egotist, standing alone in his self-imagined greatness, lies in a world of lie, because the truth about himself would puncture his self-inflation. Pride rightly is called the source of all other evils. As Shakespeare put it, “Fling away ambition; by that sin fell the angels. How can man then, in the image of His Maker, expect to win by it?”

A word hardly ever spoken by the scribes and Pharisees, or in modern speech, is humility, or the virtue which regulates a person’s undue estimation of himself. Humility is not underestimating oneself, such as a talented singer denying he can sing. Humility is truth – seeing ourselves as we really are –

- ✓ not as we think we are,
- ✓ not as the public believes us to be,
- ✓ but as we really are.

The candle can say it is brighter than a lightning bug, but it is dimmer than the sun. In other words, as followers of Our Blessed Lord, the only one we should compare ourselves to is

Our Blessed Lord, and every one of us should walk away with an inferiority complex.

Humility also prevents putting an extravagant value on distinctions and honors. The humble person is usually uncomfortable when he is praised because he knows his gifts are from God. The humble man may be great, but if he is, he:

- ✓ hires no press agents,
- ✓ blows no trumpets,
- ✓ employs no sky writers,
- ✓ unfolds no banners,
- ✓ courts no adulation.

Rather, while aiding and lightening the load of others, they long to be like angels, who while ministering, are themselves unseen.

Humility is the pathway to knowledge. No scientist would have ever learned the secrets of the atom if in his conceit, he told the atom what he thought it ought to do.

When Our Blessed Lord said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children," He basically suggested that university professors will have to

become like children to enter they kingdom of heaven; they must admit, like children, that God knows more than they do.

I recently read a story about a young boy named Baxter, from South Mississippi, who was a die-hard Vikings fan. He received the dream of his life, to watch his beloved Vikings play in person against the New Orleans Saints in Tulane Stadium. Every part of the trip to the stadium, the game itself which the Vikings won, and what happened immediately after the game was a little bit of heaven right here on earth. Leaving the stadium, he looked over the rail and saw the Vikings players boarding the buses. He ran down the ramp and made his way to the players, shook hands with Carl Eller, inches away from Alan Page and Wally Hilgenberg, Coach Bud Grant not five feet from him. As the buses pulled away, he was alone. No Mom and Dad. No police officer to tell he was lost. No one. Twelve years old, strange stadium, strange city, and it was getting dark. He walked the entire stadium three times. He couldn't believe how fast the stadium emptied out. Then the stadium lights went out. Frantic, he cried til he could cry no more. For what seemed like an eternity, he sat in a dark stadium.

Then suddenly, all the lights went on, and over the sound system, he heard the most blessed sound he had ever heard, one word, “Baxter!” shouted by his father. And though he could not see his father, his fear left him immediately.

Like Baxter with his mind on nothing else but Vikings players, coach and autographs, he did not hear his father calling after him as he ran down the ramp and got himself lost in the crowd of fans. But he heard his father’s voice in the stillness and darkness.

Pharisees will not hear the Father’s voice while they brag about their cashmere sweaters and Rolex watches. Pharisees will not hear the Father’s voice while they tell others to clean up the mess. Pharisees will only hear the Father’s voice when they take off their cashmere sweaters and their Rolex watches, and help to clean up the mess.

A final thought on humility. It is fitting, leading up to Veterans Day on Friday, to close this homily by quoting Father Dennis Edward O'Brien, USMC

It is the soldier, not the reporter,
who has given us freedom of the press.

It is the soldier, not the poet,
who has given us freedom of speech.

It is the soldier, not the campus organizer,
who has given us the freedom to demonstrate.
It is the soldier, not the lawyer,
who has given us the right to a fair trial.
It is the soldier,
who salutes the flag,
who serves under the flag,
and whose coffin is draped by the flag,
who allows the protester to burn the flag.