

- Last Sunday I spoke of how difficult it is to get into Heaven, for as Jesus told us last Sunday, the Gate of Heaven is narrow, and many who try to enter it are not strong enough to do so.
- Frightening as that thought may be, today we are given the key that unlocks Heaven's narrow gate: it is the virtue of humility.
- Indeed, St. Bernard once wrote that, "Humility is necessary not only for the acquisition of virtues, but even of salvation. For the Gate of Heaven, as Christ Himself testifies, is so narrow that it admits only little ones."
- In other words, there are no proud or big-headed people in Heaven, only the humble. So if we wish to go to Heaven, this is a virtue we must acquire first – which is not easy – because the opposing vice of pride is so rampant.
- Pride is man's primordial enemy. It was pride that caused the devil to rebel against God and be cast out of Heaven; and beginning with Adam and Eve, the evil one has used this vice to tempt man to sin because it's so effective!
- The sin of pride hardens man's heart, hurting his ability to love as he should, and it blinds him to the truth about God and himself.
- Pride also disorders our relationship with God because it violates the first and greatest commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me."
- Pride puts one's self before God. Through pride we love our selves with our whole hearts and souls and minds and strength, rather than God.
- In this way an element of pride is present in all sin, because all sin is a matter of rejecting God's will in lieu of our own. In every sinful action we proudly put ourselves before God.
- In contrast, humility is the virtue that enables us to see the truth about ourselves, to see ourselves as God sees us. But, that's not always pretty, is it? For all of us are sinners who've fallen short of the glory of God.
- If we suffer with pride, it can quite difficult to own up to our faults and failings, yet there are great advantages to be gained by being humble.
- First, when in humility we see our own faults and weaknesses, when we know all too well how we fail God and are in constant need of His mercy, we become more willing to put up with the weaknesses of others and extend them mercy.
- When we are humble enough to know our own weaknesses, we are much more willing to overlook other people's weaknesses, to forgive their slights and injustices against us, and to help them overcome their faults.
- In this way, being willing to extend mercy is one of the beautiful fruits of the virtue of humility. As we know from the Beatitudes, those who are merciful will be shown mercy in return! Being merciful in this life helps assure us of God's eternal mercy.
- Our first reading from the Book of Sirach also tells us that if we are humble, we will win the esteem of others and find favor with God. Truly, there is nothing that moves the human heart both to compassion and respect like witnessing a person's humility.
- If this true of sinful man, it is even truer of our Savior, Who delights in our humble acknowledgement of our faults and failings out of love for Him and our desire for His mercy.

- As offensive as our sins may be in God's sight, when we humbly confess them and ask for His pardon and for the grace to overcome our sins, our Lord so quickly forgives us and embraces us – just like the father of the Prodigal Son.
- Furthermore, when through the virtue of humility we can come to an honest and true assessment of ourselves – when we see ourselves as God sees us – it is then that our relationship with God becomes rightly ordered.
- Knowing the truth about ourselves helps us to see how much we need God's grace, how dependent we are upon Him, and how without Him we can do nothing.
- This recognition of our fundamental and absolute need of God leads us to worshipping and adoring Him as we should.
- In this world of ours in which man has conquered and mastered so much of creation, it can be all too easy to believe in one's own power and strength. We can be all too quick to give ourselves undue credit for our accomplishments.
- So the virtue of humility helps to put us in check: to remind us that whatever gifts, talents, or power we have is only by God's graciousness, and that it is ultimately only by God's grace that we are able to accomplish anything.
- The last great advantage to humility is that it gives us peace and confidence, for the humble soul does not fret over its faults and failings, but simply commends itself to God's mercy, trusting in Him as a child throws itself in its mother's arms.
- So knowing that humility is necessary to gain Heaven, how do we cultivate it?
- Like any virtue, humility is gained by practicing it. A good way to begin cultivating humility is to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal your faults and sins. In my own experience, this is a prayer request that He never fails to answer...and usually with expediency!
- Once you know well your faults and failings, be quick to acknowledge them when others notice them, and apologize as necessary.
- Learn, as well, to accept contempt, injustices, insults, and being disregarded by others, accepting all these vexations with humor, courtesy, and good will.
- Give in to the will of others when conscience allows, but mind your own business and stay out of others' affairs. Refuse to dwell upon the faults of others, but be mindful of your own.
- Speak little of yourself, and do not seek to be admired or loved. Rather, seek only to please God and to do His will, especially in showing mercy to all.
- In doing these things we will grow in humility, which in turn will make us more merciful, win favor in the sight of God and men, rightly order our relationship with God, and give us peace and confidence.
- Brothers and sisters, it is in humbling ourselves in this life that we assure ourselves of being exalted in the next. Humility is the key that unlocks the narrow gate of Heaven.
- May we cultivate well this most important of virtues, and help others to do the same.
- O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto Thine.