

22nd Sunday

1. The readings for today speak of humility. I think we all know what humility is. We may not be able to give a definition of it, but we know it when we see it in people. And after seeing it in a person, if someone asks us to explain what we see, we would say something like this: they are not full of themselves. They are not selfish. They think of others.

2. The commentary series Celebration gave two examples to explain this virtue of humility, one funny, the other beautiful. The funny one is about a man whose flight was cancelled. In a rage he pushed himself to the front of the waiting line and demanded a first-class ticket on the next available flight. The ticket agent told him that she was sorry but he would have to wait his turn. He responded by screaming at her: “Do you have any idea who I am?” She responded by picking up the public address microphone and saying, “Attention, please. There is a gentleman here at the ticket counter who does not know who he is. If there is anyone in the airport who can identify him, please come to the counter.” The man retreated and those waiting in line burst into applause.

3. The other story is about the famous black singer Marian Anderson. She was born in Philadelphia in 1897. When she applied for admission to a music school, she was told: “We don’t take colored.” The famous conductor Toscanini, after hearing her sing in Vienna, Austria, told her: “A voice like yours is heard only once in a hundred years.” President and Mrs. Roosevelt invited her to sing at the White House, but the Daughters of the American Revolution protested. So Mrs. Roosevelt resigned from the Daughters and then she and the president asked Marian to sing at the Lincoln Mall on Easter Sunday, 1943. 75000 people came to hear her.

4. At the height of her career reporters asked her to name the greatest moment of her life. They thought she would talk about one of her great musical moments like the one at the Lincoln Mall, but she told them that it was the day when she went home and told her mother, who had raised three daughters all alone, that she wouldn’t have to take in washing anymore.

5. Why is that an example of humility? Because humility means not being stuck on oneself, and Marian wasn’t. She was happy because of what she could do for her mother, not for herself.

5. So, the next time our flight is cancelled, let's not push our way to the front of the line to tell the ticket agent how important we are. That we can do. But I am not sure if we are ready to follow both examples in today's Gospel literally. Are we ready to invite guests to our house who cannot reciprocate the invitation? Maybe not. But we might be able to follow the Lord's other example. We can take a lower place at table, or an equivalent thereof in our daily lives. That is a little easier to do.