

**22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski**  
**September 1, 2019**

I love baseball. And while the Kansas City Royals have not exactly set on-fire the baseball world in the last few years, I still recall and revel in the excitement of the pennant surge of 2014 and the World Series championship in 2015. And I will always have a fondness in my heart for Don Denkinger and a true thankfulness that instant replay was NOT in effect back in 1985!

My enjoyment of baseball goes back to my childhood in St. Louis when I listened to Harry Carey and Jack Buck on my transistor radio every night. However, I was no idle spectator. At every opportunity, my friends and I would go to the parish field of St. Luke the Evangelist church, known as "the Lot," and play as long as the sun shined. Whether there were just two of us or a multitude, we played baseball from sun-up to sun-down.

Last week, our readings spoke of the virtues of persistence and discipline, particularly in the Gospel reading in which Jesus urges us to "strive to enter through the narrow gate." Persistence and discipline are virtues that we all should try to practice in our daily lives, but those virtues are of particular value to a baseball player, or any athlete for that matter.

Persistence and discipline were virtues that I witnessed on the baseball diamond, early in my childhood, when I attended Cardinal baseball games with my father at the old Busch Stadium, Sportsman's Park, and watched one of the greatest baseball players of all time, Stan "the Man" Musial, play the game. Stan was my hero: A great player, true gentleman and humble. Although Stan was one of the first players to make \$100,000 per season in 1957, after a subpar season in 1959, he requested that the team cut his salary to \$80,000. Can you imagine any professional athlete today swallowing his pride and displaying such **humility** as to request a pay-cut for lack of performance?

Humility is the subject of today's readings:

- In the first reading from Sirach, we are urged to "conduct [our] affairs with humility" and "find favor with God."
- While in the Gospel reading, Jesus uses the scene at a Sabbath dinner in the home of a Pharisee to preach about humility by urging us to be humble and "take the lowest place" of honor at the dinner table.

However, humility is more than taking a lowly place at the dinner table or requesting a pay-cut, for that matter.

Humility is one of the virtues most characteristic of Jesus. It is the only virtue that he explicitly told us to learn from him and which we just

heard in the Gospel Acclamation: **"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves."** Humility is also one of the most misunderstood and least appreciated of the virtues. It is not a virtue of the weak; rather, it is a virtue of the strong.

Humility is not an inferiority complex or a negative self image. Nor is it a denial of the talents that God has given us; it doesn't mean that we hide our talents. We all recall the parable of the talents in which each of us is called to fully utilize those talents we possess. Instead of suppressing our actions, humility inspires us to do great things when we recognize that we are only instruments in the hand of God. We can do anything that God wants us to do.

Humility is acceptance of the truth. And the truth is that **we are feeble, fickle, fallible, sinful human beings.** But it is also true that **we, each and every one of us, are gifted, graced, unique and indispensable. Each of us is distinctive: An unrepeatable gift of God.** We have an inner core of goodness that nothing can destroy. And, in spite of all of our physical warts, psychological quirks and spiritual infidelities, God loves us unconditionally with a love that we cannot merit or are even worthy of. Therefore, we have a choice: We can be humble and accept God's love, mercy and forgiveness as Peter did after his threefold denial of Jesus, or

we can believe that God can never forgive us—the ultimate sin of human pride—like Judas Iscariot.

We don't have to prove anything to God. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He loves us, not because of who we are but because of who he is. All we have to do is drop our human pretensions and be content with just being us.

We all experience humiliating or embarrassing moments in our lives. But through the practice of true humility by placing our trust in the Lord, instead of being upset and disturbed during those moments, we can be glad and rejoice for we **will find peace and rest for our souls.**