

Attitude Adjustment, Week 1 – Introduction (924)

St. Leo's Parish

First of Five

March 8/9, 2025

- What I want them to know:** That humility is a great virtue for drawing closer to God and others
- What I want them to feel:** Confident that they can adjust their attitude to make humility possible
- What I want them to do:** Be faithful to the Lenten Series
Bring a friend next week to meet the “New kid on the block”

Introduction

- And I'd like to begin with what I call a Message Series, that is a common theme based on the Sunday readings for all the Sundays of Lent and each Sunday message – while it can stand alone – will also build on the prior week
- And we're looking at a particular attitude adjustment about the most important virtue of all.
- I say it's the most fundamental virtue because it stands before, it lies beneath every other virtue. We're talking about the virtue of humility and adjusting our attitude to how we think about humility.

Humility

- Humility. Many people think of humility as weakness, low self-esteem, or a lack of ambition.
- None of that is humility.
- Humility is a clear opinion of yourself, as St. Bernard said, “Humility is knowledge of yourself as you really are.”

- It's derived from a Latin word, *humilitas*, which gives us our English word, "ground" or "grounded."
- To be humble is to be grounded, to be rooted.

Humility in Business

- In his book, "Good to Great," Jim Collins studied companies that successfully moved from good performers to become great performers in the marketplace.
- And his study discovered what he came to call "level five leaders."
- Every company that moved from good to great did so under the leadership and direction of "level five leaders."
- Level five leaders represent a rare combination of sincere humility and strength of will.
- He said that these leaders are absolutely ambitious, but they channel their ambitions into the company or project that they're leading and serving, and not into themselves.
- People who live the virtue of humility are like that; they channel their strength and energy into something greater than themselves.

Humility of the Israelites

- Our first reading from Deuteronomy presents the final teaching of Moses to the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land.
- We know that the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years on their way to the Promised Land.
- During that time, they were impatient, ungrateful and arrogant, sinning before God.
- Realizing this, we read:

**"We cried to the Lord...and he heard our cry
and saw our affliction"**
- Notice they recognized their lack of humility! And in doing so they are reinvigorated.

“He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand...with signs and wonders...and he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey”

- It wasn't by their own power that the Israelites escaped from Egypt and slavery, but because of God's strong hand and outstretched arm.
- In short, they've become quite humble in recognizing that:
 - It was God who parted the Red Sea.
 - It was God who provided food in the desert.
 - It is God who is going to give them blessing and abundance in the Promised Land.

As We Begin This Series

- Well, as we begin this series, it might help to be honest.
 - Honestly, humility is difficult. It's difficult for most, all of us, it's difficult for me.
 - It's challenging to be humble even when we want to be.
 - Our pride, our ego gets in the way.
 - We don't like to look bad or lose control. We do not want to admit when we're wrong. We do not like to say we're sorry.
 - It's hard to be humble even when we want to be. And a lot of the time, we don't want to be.
 - If we've been disrespected, if I've been disrespected, I don't want humility, I want an apology.
 - If I've been offended, I don't want humility, I want payback.
 - If I've been hurt, I don't want humility, I want revenge.
- These are all reasons why we need to work on humility by adjusting our attitude.

Attitude Adjustment Regarding Humility

- Humility isn't something that lessens, diminishes, or weakens us, but something that strengthens us in becoming who God wants us to be.
- So, friends, I'd offer you 3 ways to look at humility:
 - **First, humility grounds us in the basic reality that there is a God and it's not me.**
KEY WORD: I'M NOT GOD Let's repeat that...
 - Like the Israelites, we recognize that God is God and everything we have comes from him.
 - All our achievements at work or school, our finances, even our family, are all gifts from God.
 - **Second, humility grounds us in knowing that we are made for relationships.**
KEY WORD: MADE FOR RELATIONSHIPS Let's repeat that...
 - We need one another. And humility is a basic ingredient.
 - If you can be humble, then you can be kind
 - If you can be humble, you can be merciful
 - If you could be humble, you can be compassionate
 - **Third, humility grounds us in the basic reality that God insists on it before he can act in our lives.**
KEY WORD: ALL BEGINS WITH HUMILITY Let's repeat that...
 - You don't need to be highly intelligent, clever in business, outstanding in finances to be successful with God
 - You don't need to be graceful in appearance or skillful in athletics to be successful with God.
- All it takes is the humble admission of knowing who you are and who God is.

Conclusion and HeartWork

- I'd challenge you with 2 ideas as HeartWork
 - First, be faithful to the 5-part Message Series for Lent
 - Second, invite a friend to Mass next week and have them meet "the new guy"
- It could make a difference in your life, my life and the parish of St. Leo's
- See you next week.

Attitude Adjustment, Week 2 – Listen
885 words
March 15/16, 2025

To Know: That listening can be transformative for myself and for a church community.

To Feel: Secure about becoming a better listener

To Do: To listen to God in reading the Gospel of the day and to choose one person for whom I can be a better listener.

Introduction

- Last week, I mentioned that I would begin with a Message Series, that is, a common theme based on the Sunday readings for all the Sundays of Lent and each Sunday message – while it can stand alone – will also build on the prior week.
- And over these Lenten weekends, we're looking at the application of specific virtues when it comes to more successfully living the Christian life.
- And last week we looked at a particular attitude adjustment about the most important virtue of all.
- We talked about the virtue of humility and adjusting our attitude to how we think about humility.
- We learned that humility is not a low opinion of yourself, but instead it's a clear opinion of yourself.
- Humility is knowledge of myself as I really am.

Upon Mount Tabor

- This week we're looking at still another virtue that we may need some "Attitude Adjustment" justing.
- It's **listening**. Yes, listening can be thought of as a virtue, in that a virtue can be any habit of high standard.
- To look more closely at the subject of listening, we're going to turn to the Gospel of Luke, where in the 9th chapter of St. Luke we read this:

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went up the mountain to pray.

- He takes the three of them on a little retreat up a mountain to pray.
- Luke continues:

While he was praying, his face changed in appearance, and behold, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his crucifixion.

- This incident is called the Transfiguration. What that means is, that while Jesus is praying, his inner glory is revealed.
- And this experience is given as a gift to Peter, James and John to:
 - Bolster their faith
 - Strengthen them for what was coming.
- Understandably, bewildered, Peter says:

It's good that we're here, let's make tents for you, and Moses and Elijah, but he didn't know what he was saying.

- Like any amazing experience, Peter doesn't want this one to end. Who would?
- But even as he's speaking, this whole scene becomes even more amazing!

A cloud came and they became frightened, when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud, a voice that said, "This is my chosen son, listen to him."

- Remember, this is God's voice from heaven:
 - Quieting Peter
 - Overwhelming Peter
 - Terrifying Peter!

The Virtue of Listening

- A mighty majestic scene, but with quite a simple message, *“This is my chosen son, listen to him.”*
 - Listen to him
 - Because his teaching come before from Moses to Elijah, so listen to him.
 - Because it requires listening, and that’s not always easy to do, listen to him.
 - Because it means to hear with undivided attention, so listen to him!
- Unfortunately, at times we don’t want to listen and sometimes we’re afraid to. I’ve been there; have you?

Connection Between Listening and Humility

- Listening does require humility, yes, humbling ourselves, at least enough, to recognize that on our own, we don’t know how life works.
- It takes humility to put aside
 - My own self-importance,
 - My own self-absorption,
 - My own self-interest,

To slow down and to listen to what somebody else may have to tell me – or God forbid – to teach me.
- So, putting last week’s **humility** together with this week’s **listening** and you can see how this series is building.

HeartWork for the Week

- But how to do it, how to apply this message? That’s the question before us.
- I’d like to suggest that you pick a time and a place this week when you’re going to pray in quiet.
- It DOES matter:
 - That you specify a time of 5 or 10 minutes each day...

- That you specify a place where you can do that ...
- To simply rest in silence and let the voice of God speak to your heart.
- And the easiest way to start listening to Jesus in this quiet space is to begin reading the Gospels of the day.
- For some people, that sounds simple, but it could be a game changer; it could be more important than you actually realize.
- Few years ago, during Lent, I challenged parishioners to read just one of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.
- I challenged everybody to pick just one Gospel and, in the course of the season of Lent, to read it from beginning to end, and we received some amazing feedback from that exercise.
- People that have been going to church their whole life long discovered things that Jesus said, and Jesus did, that they never even “heard” before.
- Their faith and their relationship with Christ went to a whole new level simply by slowing down and listening to Jesus as he speaks to us in the Gospels.
- That daily 5 minutes of silence reflecting on the Word of God could we be your Mount Tabor!
- Imagine that!
- Along with that exercise, try this one this week.
- Ask yourself, “*Who else do I need to be listening to this week?*”
- Is there someone at home, at work, at school that you know is frustrated with you because they believe that you aren’t listening to them?
- Maybe you could start to change that this week?

Conclusion

- We’ll be here next week with still another installment to **Humility** and **Listening**. It’s called **comparing**.
- I would invite you to bring a friend. We’ll welcome them and get them caught up.
- It’s not too late.

- I look forward to having you with us.
- I love you very much.

Attitude Adjustment, Week #3 – Comparison (1,149) March 22, 2025

To Know: That comparing is a losing game.

To Feel: To feel relief in knowing that there is a way out of the dilemma.

To Do: To pray for that one person with whom I tend to compare myself.

Introduction

- As many of you know I began my ministry among you with a **Message Series**, that is, a common theme based on the Sunday readings for all the Sundays of Lent.
- **Each Sunday** message – while it can stand alone – will also build on the prior week.
- And over these Lenten weekends, we're looking at the overarching theme of "**Attitude Adjustment**" with each week focusing in on the application of specific virtues when it comes to more successfully living the Christian life.

Connecting the Weeks

- **Two weeks ago**, we looked at a particular attitude adjustment regarding the most important virtue of all, **humility**.
- We learned that humility is not a low opinion of yourself, but instead it's a **clear** opinion of yourself.
- Humility is knowledge of yourself **as you really are**.
- **Last week**, we looked at a second virtue that could stand a little attitude adjustment; it was **Listening**.
- **Listening** does require humility, yes, humbling ourselves at least enough to recognize that on our own, we don't know how life works.
- If I'm to listen – really listen to you – I've **got to put aside** my own self-importance, self-absorption, and self-interest.
- It takes slowing down and opening these two ears.

- Or as my mother used to tell us kids, “You’ve **got two ears and one mouth**. Listen twice as much as you speak!” Pretty good advice, **even after** all these years!
- So, putting **humility** together with last week’s **listening** and you begin to see how this series is building.

Today’s Installment: Comparing

- Well, today we’re going to look at a passage from the Gospel of Luke to learn of a **third virtue** that could use some attitude adjustment.
- Luke tells us this.

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices.

- It seems that some **folks are questioning** Jesus.
- **Pontius Pilate**, the Roman governor who later will condemn Jesus, has killed some Galileans inside the temple of Jerusalem.
- And their bloodshed has **desecrated** the sacred temple.
- **But why** are these guys bringing this event to Jesus’ attention?
- And because **Jesus can read people’s hearts**, he sees something in them that isn’t good.
- Jesus says to them **in reply**:

Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way, they were greater sinners? By no means!

- So, Jesus understands their intention: **they are comparing themselves to the people Pilate had killed**.
- And they’re thinking that **because bad things** happened to them, they **must have been** bad people.
- Their thinking is that if bad things **haven’t happened** to them, they must **be better people**.

- That is **why Jesus tells** them, *“Don’t get all self-righteous just because you **currently happen to be** in a better circumstances!”*
- The **reality is**, you and I are in the same circumstance; we’re just like them!

Stop Comparing

- **Jesus’ point?** Before God, we’re **all equally in need** of grace.
- Two thousand years ago, **people looked at other people’s** misfortunes in order **to feel better** about themselves.
- And – let’s face it, so do we, **so do we at times.**
- There’s **something in us** that just wants to make comparisons with others **to feel better** about ourselves.
- And when bad luck befalls others, we say, *“Whew! I’m glad we’re not in the same place. I guess we’re better than they are!”*
- Go to **any grocery store**, and at the checkout counter you see pictures on those **magazine covers** of people who seemed to have **had it all together.**
- They **found life and love**; they were on **top of the world** in their careers.
- They had the perfect **home**, the perfect **skin**, the perfect **hair**, or were a **sure shoo-in** for the Academy Awards.
- And then suddenly, their **lives are a wreck.** They’re deep in **debt**; their **marriage** is falling apart and so are **their looks**; their **kids are out of control.**
- Those magazines are prominently **displayed at the cash register** because people are **reading them while** they wait to check out, and **as the line moves** and you haven’t finished the article, you **end up buying** the magazine.
- **Great marketing** technique; don’t you think!
- But why do we **want to read** them?
- Because **we compare** our lives to their lives **and feel better** in the process.

- **Reversal of fortunes** of famous people make for **great headlines** and for a reason.
- **Comparing** ourselves to others who've fallen in some way **helps us feel better** about ourselves and our own lives!

The Danger of Comparing

- Honestly? We **compare ourselves to everyone** around us all the time, and we all do it.
- **Moms** compare themselves to moms, **dads** to dads, **workers** to workers, and **believe me, pastors** to other pastors!
- You should hear me talking to other pastors about St. Leo's!
Oui vey!
- **Comparisons, they happen all the time everywhere, with everyone.**
- The problem, friends, is that **comparing** ourselves to other people is **self-defeating behavior**.
- **It's a trap.** It's a trap that we **can't win**, and it **kills humility (week one)** and **limits our ability to really listen (week 2)**.
- Why? Because, **if we succeed** in the comparison,
 - we feel **pride**.
- And **if we fail** in the comparison,
 - we **feel jealousy**.
- Either way, we're a **long way from humility and an openness to listen**.

HeartWork

- So, let me ask you a question for the week ahead.
 - Who do you, **secretly** for sure, who do you **hope will fail or fall?**
 - Who do you like it / when they **get in trouble?**
 - Who do savor / when they **don't get the deal or the contract** or the **scholarship, the inheritance?**
 - Do you **secretly celebrate** their setbacks?

- Maybe you **would never admit** that to another living person, but **Jesus knows your heart. Admit it** to him!
- This week,
 - I want to challenge you to see that person in your mind's eye and **pray for that person.**
 - Pray for **their well-being** and their success.
 - It **won't feel good.** It might **even hurt.**
- But those are **growing pains** that we've got to experience if **we're going to really adjust** our attitude about **comparisons.**
- Hope to see you next week for the next installment of "Attitude Adjustment."
- Our focus will be on: "**Mistakes, Faults, & Failures.**"
- **Who me, Lord?** Yes, you Nicholas, and yes, you!

Attitude Adjustment
Week #4 – Mistakes, Faults, & Failures (936)
March 30, 2025

To Know: No mistake, fault or failure cannot be forgiven.

To Feel: There's hope for me.

To Do: Be humble enough to admit my sin and ask God's forgiveness of another or in confession

Introduction

- As many of you know I began my ministry among you with a Message Series, that is, a common theme based on the Sunday readings, for all the Sundays of Lent.
- Each Sunday message – while it can stand alone – will also build on the prior week.
- And over these Lenten weekends, we're looking at the application of specific virtues when it comes to living the Christian life more successfully.

Connecting the Weeks

- Three weeks ago, we looked at a particular attitude adjustment regarding the most important virtue of all, **humility**.
- We learned that humility is not a low opinion of yourself, but instead it's a **clear** opinion of yourself.
- Humility is knowledge of myself as I really am.

- Two weeks ago, we looked at a **second virtue** that could stand a little adjusting.
- **It was "Listening" and it does require humility, yes, humbling ourselves at least enough to recognize that on our own, we don't know how life works.**
- If I'm to listen – really listen to you – I've got to put aside my own self-importance, self-absorption, and self-interest.
- It takes slowing down and opening these two ears.

- Or as my mother used to tell us kids, “*You’ve got two ears and one mouth. Listen twice as much as you speak!*” Pretty good advice!
- **Last week to humility and listening we took up the danger of comparing and called it the comparison trap.**
- That’s what it is, a trap that kills our humility. We’re tempted over and over again to compare ourselves to others, especially when it comes to other people’s faults and failures and we do it, so we can feel better about ourselves.
- It’s understandable, but it's unhelpful.
- It only distracts us and gets us off course and can inflame our pride.
- Having the humility to stop comparing ourselves to others and to make the only good comparison can pay off big.
- What comparison is that? It’s comparing who we are in relation to God.

Summary of the Prodigal Son

- **Today, we’re going to discuss how to be humble in the face of our faults and failures.**
- And to do it, we’re looking at a surprising story Jesus tells in Gospel.
- And here’s what’s going on at this point in the story.
- Tax collectors and sinners are drawing near to Jesus, but the Pharisees and Scribes begin to complain saying, “*This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.*”
- So, people who would never have anything to do with religion or God, are attracted to Jesus.

- This bothers the church people, since they think that they are holy by separating themselves from such people.
- Yet, Jesus, dispels such notions, and the church people don’t get it, so they’re grumbling and complaining.
- In response, Jesus tells the story of the Prodigal Son, a boy who takes his inheritance and squanders it.

- We learn that his squandering ends badly with no money, a severe famine, finding himself in dire need.
- He takes a job tending the swine, something no respecting Jew would do, for swine were considered unclean.
- Just as he's gone as low as he can the story turns on a single phrase.

Coming to Our Senses

- *“Coming to his senses,”* that is, it dawns on him that not only does he have a problem, but he's the very author of his problem.
- When we have a problem, it can take quite a lot for us to even acknowledge it, we know that.
- But even after we do, it can be even more difficult for us to take responsibility for it.
- Everything in us wants to blame somebody else, to find an excuse. To take the easy way out.
- *“My marriage is in trouble because my wife doesn't understand what I need.”*
- *“My career is going nowhere because my boss is an idiot.”*
- That's certainly one way to approach your problems, and some of us at times do that.

The Other Way

- **But another route is offered to us through humility.**
- We can be humble and take responsibility for our part in the struggle.
- *“My marriage is in trouble because I haven't made it a priority.”*
- *“My career is going nowhere because I haven't developed my skills and put in the extra effort.”*

- **The Prodigal Son chooses to humbly accept responsibility for his actions, and it turns his situation around.**
- It's a fairly simple formula, and it works exactly the same for us now as it did for him then.
 - **Weakness plus humility equals strength.**
 - **Disappointment plus humility equals success.**
 - **Failure plus humility equals victory.**
- And that list could go on and on and on.
- Ultimately, it's the attitude of humility that allows us to take any situation in life and turn it around for our own advantage.

What's It Going to Take?

- The Prodigal Son comes to his senses and decides to go back to the Father and admit his folly.
- So, he resolves, *"I'll get up and go to the father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me as you would treat one of your workers.'"*
- Notice that he doesn't make any excuse for his behavior.
- He just comes to his senses and humbly admits, *"Father, I sinned."*
- And the story has a happy ending. His father has been on the front porch each day longing for his son's return
- So is yours all it will take are those powerful 3 words: *"Father, I have sinned."*
- For your HeartWork this week and as a preparation for Easter, I'd challenge you to be humble enough to admit your sin and ask God's forgiveness of the one you've hurt or seek our confession.
- We are here a half-hour before each weekend Mass.

Attitude Adjustment
Week #5 – Sin (992)
April 6, 2025

To Know: That sin can serve a purpose in my life

To Feel: Feel a sense of hope that humility and admission of my wrongdoings open me to God's grace and forgiveness

To Do: To consider making amends with one whom I've sinned against or sinned against me, or going to the Sacrament of Confession

Connecting the Weeks

- This Lent we've been looking at a **Message Series**, that is, a common theme based on the Sunday readings, for all the Sundays of Lent.
- **Each Sunday** message – while it can stand alone – will also build on the prior week.
- The overall theme has been **“Attitude Adjustment.”**
- That is to say, that my adjusting my attitude in particular areas can have a profound impact on the quality of my life as a Christian.
- Each week we looked at concrete ways to apply each area:
 - **HUMILITY** is knowledge of myself as a really am.
 - **LISTENING** is knowing I have 2 ears, but only 1 mouth so I need to listen twice as much as I speak.
 - **COMPARING** is a trap that makes me want to feel better at another's expense.
 - **MISTAKES-FAULTS-FAILURES** hold us prisoner, but once we can admit them, the way is open for forgiveness
- And today, the final Sunday before next Sunday which is Palm Sunday, our focus will be on sin.
- I know, it's **a word we don't like to hear**, but it's a word that speaks the dark side of our choices.

Today

- With the word “sin” we’re looking at a **particular attitude adjustment** that every single one of us **needs to make, myself** at the top of the list.
- **As we wrap up** our series today, we want to look at **how helpful the attitude of humility** can be when it comes to recognizing and eliminating sin in our life.

Background of the Story

- And to do it, we’re looking at a passage from **John’s Gospel** where we read this.

“Early in the morning Jesus arrives again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sits down and teaches them.”

- And here’s what happens.

“The scribes and Pharisees bring a woman caught in adultery and make her stand in the middle. They say to him, ‘Teacher this woman was called in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commands to stone such a woman. So, what do you say?’”

- They say this **to test him** so they could have some charge to bring against him.
- So, Jesus, teaching before this huge crowd including the religious leaders is interrupted by them.
- They’ve caught a woman, “in the very act of committing adultery.” How, **one wonders, did they do that?**
- **Think about it.** No, actually, **don’t think** about it!
- Anyway, they create this scene **simply to trip up Jesus** and trap him as somebody **who breaks the law.**

- They are deliberately casting him in **an unwinnable position**, because **Jewish law** called for death by stoning, but the **Roman law forbade** this.
- However, **either answer, he'd be breaking** someone's law, setting himself up for trouble with the authorities, which is what his enemies want.

What Jesus Does

- In the face of this impossible challenge, **Jesus bends down** and begins to write on the ground with his finger.
- He takes his time to answer and finally says,

“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone.”

- One of the **all-time brilliant responses**, he totally **reframes** the issue so that it's **not about the accusation; it's about the accusers** and their sinfulness.
- What he writes, we don't know. All we know is that,

“In response, they went away one by one.”

- So, Jesus remains alone with the woman. He says to her,

“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? ‘No one sir.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Then neither do I condemn you.’”

The Meaning of His Action

- He **humbles the religious leaders** who have **exalted themselves** with so much pride they can't even recognize him as the Messiah the Jewish People were awaiting.
- He **humbles the mighty** and he **exalts the humble, lifting this woman up** out of her shame and giving her a way forward.

- His charge to her is, “*Go, and sin no more.*” But I think the emphasis there is on, “Go.”
- “Go.” He **gives her life back**, and more than that, **a way forward** into her future, a future that now can be lived **free from sin and shame. Humility** has been **her path out**.
- Well, as we know, not all sin is of the same weight.
- For instance, the **woman’s sin** is actually **less weighty than** the sins of the **religious leaders**.
- It’s true she committed **adultery** and that’s **pretty serious**.
- But **their sin is pride**. And that’s **more serious**. It’s the **most serious sin of all**.
- It was the **sin of Lucifer** and that’s the sin **of the Pharisees**, too.
- That’s **why** repeatedly, **Jesus reserves his most withering criticism** for them.

How Sins Compare

- **Whatever stage or station** of life you’re in, our lives are sometimes **marred by sin**.
- And if you’re **like most people** in our community, **perhaps** that sin is **not terribly serious** in the larger scheme of things, perhaps **not always deeply consequential**, like:
 - gossip or ingratitude,
 - impatience, overindulgence,
 - impurity, and temperance,
 but sin, for sure.
- Did you know that sometimes **God actually allows us to struggle with sin** and it’s very possible the reason for that is **to teach us humility?**
- Sometimes **God saves us** from the **worst** possible sin, the **sin of pride**, as we **struggle with lesser sin**.

Conclusion

- We live with little **daily reminders** of how **far from perfect** we are.
- Humble **acknowledgment of our sin** to ourselves is **the starting point**.
- And **asking forgiveness perhaps** from those we've offended, but also from time to time, perhaps **in the Sacrament of Confession** is important.
- **Either** can be **the path out of sin** and the **path into a future** freer from failings.