

14th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "C"
July 2-3, 2016

In what and whom do we boast?

Readings: Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

May I never boast of anything, save the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is quite safe to say that people abhor those who boast. We were cautioned as kids never to boast about any test scores or grades at school. Not only is it wrong, but there will always be somebody more talented than us at a given skill, wealthier in terms of finances, or any host of others measurements by which we value a person in modern society.

Saint Paul remarks in his Letter to the Galatians that we should not boast in anything except in the Cross of Christ. This means that we do not boast of our own fidelity, even if we might be proud of our faith. Our faith may never be used as a method whereby we become a source of scandal to others on account of our pride.

It also ought to be noted that St. Paul in another passage only boasts of his weaknesses, his infirmities, **not his sins**, because in boasting of his weaknesses, he does so because they are repaired by the grace of Christ. And in being repaired by the grace of Christ, God's grace enables us to rise above sin.

So, is pride ever acceptable, or is it always sinful? Thomas Aquinas tackled this question. He wrote, "Inordinate self-love is the cause of every sin... the root of pride is found to consist in man not being, in some way, subject to God and His rule."¹ Thus, pride is the excessive love of one's own excellence. It is counted as one of the seven capital sins—one of the seven deadly sins. The Catechism defines pride as: "an inordinate self-esteem or self-love, which seeks attention and honor and sets oneself in competition with God."²

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, (I-II, q. 77, art. 4)

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph # 1866.

To be clear, liking ourselves is not itself sinful- in fact, its opposite, self-loathing, is contrary to our goodness as creatures of God. But if our self-perception no longer corresponds to reality or we feel such a need to demonstrate to others our talent, our competence, our accomplishments, it is really a sign of great insecurity and weakness.

When Mohammed Ali claimed, "I'm the greatest," he was factually correct from one perspective. He was the best heavyweight boxer in his day. But a truly humble person would also recognize the source of one's greatness, as a gift from God with which we cooperate to be sure, but ultimately ought to be returned to its source. There is indeed a healthy self-esteem, one that might better be described as a lofty or courageous spirit that helps us to stand firm in achieving our greatest goods.

I think of the award winning film *Chariots of Fire* that premiered the year I graduated from High School. It is the story of Eric Liddell, a Scottish runner in the 1924 Olympics, who among other things, refused to run on the Sabbath. He took pride in his performance, but always sought to return his gifts to their Source. "I believe that God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. When I run, I feel God's pleasure." Here, pride and humility go hand in hand.

While we do not boast except in the Cross of Christ, we do take justifiable pride in the promises that Christ has given to His Church to remain with us always, as well as rejoice in the treasures he left to us in the form of the Sacraments, most especially the Eucharist.

I have felt tremendous pride in our country. I distinctly recall the celebration of our Bi-centennial, 40 years ago, or the pride of flying into New York City once on July 4th, seeing Lady Liberty in the harbor from my window seat.

Pride in this sense is certainly not sinful provided we do not believe that we have more human worth than people from other countries, because we do not. We most assuredly can count our blessings without putting down those who have less than we do. “*Boasting or bragging is an offense against truth,*”³ and it ought to hold no place in our daily lives.

Rather, we are called to do the virtuous deeds for the right reasons. Thus, “a service done with the end of helping one's neighbor can at the same time be inspired by the love of God as the ultimate end of all our actions. One and the same action can also be inspired by several intentions, such as performing a service in order to obtain a favor or to boast about it.”⁴

We boast only in the knowledge that God has loved us and called us to communion with Him. Our worship of God is our greatest and surest sign of our gratitude. He sends us forth to witness to His love and truth; let us do so willingly and joyously.

“Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.”
St. Teresa of Avila

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. # 2481.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. # 1752.