

Today's readings are all about humility which on the face of it seems a simple enough concept to grasp. After all, we all know an arrogant person when we see one unless perhaps, dare I say it, when we look in the mirror. And that's why the Prophets, the Saints and Jesus himself return to the subject of humility again and again in their writings, sayings and actions. • In our Gospel we heard Jesus tell us that the 'meek shall inherit the earth', whether they want it or not. • In the first reading we are told 'seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord'. • And in the second reading, St Paul tells us that God chooses 'what is weak in the world to shame the strong, so that no human being may boast in the presence of God'. And that's what I 'd like to concentrate on today. Humility in the presence of God. Last week, in his homily, Fr Robbie told us that people who shop around for a form of Religion which best suits their politics, or their morals or their interests are simply twisting God into an image of themselves. That's why humility before God is so important. When we turn God in our own minds and hearts into an image of ourselves, we've lost God, and when we lose God, we ourselves are lost; so, this is a pretty important thing to grasp. So how can we be humble before God? May I suggest we start with our presence at Mass. The Church tells us that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life. That's a posh way of saying it should be the most important thing in our lives. More important than anything else. It's not just one of the things in a list of things we do. If we're truly humble before the Lord, then coming to Mass is the most important thing we do every week and everything else should be dependent on it. That doesn't mean that we should scrape ourselves out of our sick bed to come to church if we are truly ill, or that we should abandon someone in dire need of our care, but it does mean that if we book a holiday somewhere where we can't go to Mass on a Sunday, the Eucharist is not the source and summit of our Christian life, and if we miss a Sunday Mass because we 'need ' to go to a football match, the Eucharist is not the source and summit of our Christian life. This is not my opinion, it's the teaching of the Church, and the teaching of the Church is the teaching of Jesus, and the teaching of Jesus is the

teaching of God. Cherry picking the teaching of God is making him into an image of ourselves, and that's when we start to get lost. So, please let's be humble before the Lord and come to see him at Mass, at least every Sunday and on Holy Days of Obligation. But before I am accused of preaching to the converted, because after all, here we all are at a Sunday Mass in the presence of the Lord, it is important to stress that turning up is only the start of our journey of humility before the Lord. All too often we hear people say that they don't come to Mass because they get nothing out of it. When people complain about the Mass, be it the style or the singing, or the icons, or the language, or the noisy kids, or extremist Brummie deacons who tell you have to come to Mass every Sunday, what those people are really saying, is that they struggle to encounter God in the Mass. The reason for this is that their image of God doesn't comply with the dysfunctional mayhem they see going on around them. If this is you, and I was to say you, you too are making God into an image of yourself, you may well come back at me indignantly and say, but bad liturgy doesn't do justice to the Lord. And you'd be right .... and at the same time, you'd be wrong. Yes, it is our duty to do our best to make the Liturgy as beautiful as we can, but God has given us the gift of aesthetic diversity so what's beautiful for one person may be horrible to another. We'll never resolve that, so why waste the energy? Arguing that God prefers organs over guitars or Latin over English, or vice versa, is an argument between two people each making God into an image of themselves. No, making the liturgy beautiful starts with how we individually encounter Christ in our hearts during the course of the Mass. I'll repeat that: making the liturgy beautiful starts with how we individually encounter Christ in our hearts during the course of the Mass. If that's wrong, then the best choirs, musicians, readers, preachers and celebrants in the world will not help us, but if it's right, we'll encounter the beauty, depth and profundity of the Real Presence regardless of what is going on around us. Maybe if we look at it a bit differently. We're all familiar with the term 'the sacrifice of the Mass?' But what does that really mean? Sometime ago I asked a that question to group of students at a youth retreat. They came back with some of the standard answers and some cheeky ones. The best I got was something like: 'It's called a sacrifice because we sacrifice the bread and wine God has given us, back to him'. The silliest was, it's called a

sacrifice because it's a sacrifice to come and listen to you every Sunday'. There may be some truth in both, but that's not the main reason we call the Mass a sacrifice. The Mass is a sacrifice because every time we attend Mass, we witness the sacrifice of Jesus's passion, death and resurrection. That's what the Mass is. We live in creation, in space and time, so we couldn't all be there at the Last Supper, the Crucifixion or the Resurrection, which is why Christ through his Church have given us the Mass, so that we can witness that same sacrifice he made for us every time we attend Mass. That, by the way, is why the Real Presence in the Eucharist is so important. If Jesus is not really here, how can we witness his Passion? So, let's just imagine we were around 2,000 years ago and had the opportunity to attend the crucifixion of Christ on Golgotha. We come home and someone asks us how it went, and we say, 'Well I didn't really get anything out of it'. Sounds ridiculous? Well, when we come to Mass, we come to witness the sacrifice our Lord made for our salvation, that's why it's so important to come, and when we get here, it's not what we get out of it that counts, but what we humbly bring with us to the foot of his cross.

