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Homily at Mass 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C – 1 September 2019

There's lots to *see* in the Word of God today. Haughty Pharisees have their eyes fixed on Jesus – seeing how he will conduct himself at this Sabbath day meal. Jesus is also watching – noticing how the Pharisees make their way around the table in order to get the places of honour. And the author of the letter to the Hebrews encourages us to look around the church from where we are seated today. We behold not a scene of terror, the sort of thing that accompanied Moses as he spent 40 days on Mt Sinai, where God revealed himself in fire, storm and thunder. Rather here in God's House we encounter God in his holy Word, this community of faith, and the Eucharist we celebrate at the Altar on the Lord's Day. What we experience in God's House today is a touch of Heaven. All of us are God's beloved sons and daughters, citizens of Heaven, in the company of saints and angels, united in Jesus Christ.

None of us had to log on to TryBooking for a ticket to Mass today. The doors of our churches are wide open: all are welcome and all feel welcome in God's House. We may have our favourite or usual place in the church but there is never reserved seating or classes of seating like stalls and the dress circle as you find in a theatre. All of us have a sense that we are gathered at the Altar. The Lord Jesus is the Master of the Feast. We all share equally and fully in the gift of Holy Communion. In Holy Communion we are made one with Christ. In Holy Communion we are made one in the Body of Christ, the Church.

There's a special warmth in the first reading today in a few verses from the Wisdom writer Sirach which speak to us about humility. The word humility comes from the Latin word *humus* meaning soil or earth. The earth is where we come from and to which we will return one day. The act of kneeling brings us closer to the earth. Next Saturday at St Patrick's Cathedral 7 young men will prostrate themselves flat on the ground, humbling themselves before God before they receive the gift of the priesthood. On Ash Wednesday as we receive the sign of ashes on our forehead we're all conscious of our sinfulness, our littleness, our nothingness before God our Creator: he made us from dust and to dust we shall return.

Humble as we are, we recognize that there is a marvellous equality about us. Age may bring a certain dignity, or our particular role or vocation a certain honour, but when God looks on us, he sees his own children whom he loves; sons and daughters baptised in the family of the Church, all of us reflecting the radiance and beauty of God's only Son, our brother Jesus Christ. In humility he stepped down from the right hand of the Father and took our flesh. And in one of his letters St Paul sings of Christ who was humbler yet – he became a slave, he washed our dirty feet, he embraced death for our sins. And in Baptism you and I share in Christ's new and risen life.

“My son, my daughter” God addresses us today. It's the language of parents to their children and on a day like this, the sort of way that dads talk with the children they love. Wisdom comes with age and experience: grandparents are probably more aware of this than any of us. “Be gentle” the Old Testament author encourages us today, “behave humbly.” What other bits of advice and encouragement could we give to our children in a world alive with all sorts of messages and information that seems to do more to corrupt and confuse the young rather than encourage and inspire personal goodness and decency, even heroism.

What would we like our children and grandchildren to understand, to appreciate and to take to heart?
What things have we learnt from our parents and teachers? What has been the mainstay of our life?

- From Jesus we learn his new commandment: “love one another”
- From the Ten Commandments we learn:
“Honour your father and mother”
“Keep holy the Lord’s Day”
- Popular wisdom informed by the Gospel teaches us to “forgive and forget”
- St Paul offers good advice when he tells us never to let the sun go down on our anger – the time to say sorry, to acknowledge our mistakes and our faith is now, this moment so that anger has no chance to fester or entrench division and hurt
- There is no better way to teach lessons in life than by good example: ‘Do what I do’ is always more convincing than ‘do what I say’.
- Pope John Paul II never forgot seeing his father kneeling beside his bed, his face buried in his hands. When our children see us adults participating at Mass, receiving Holy Communion devoutly, and leading the family in prayer at home, even grace before meals, then Christian life is taking firm root for the years ahead.