

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, A
[Edward Foley](#)

[Lectionary 151:](#)

Mal 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10
Ps 131:1, 2, 3
1 Thess 2:7b-9, 13
Matt 23:1-12

Possible preaching themes:

- Paul offers an unusually tender image of ministry by comparing himself to a nursing mother
- Both the opening reading and the gospel address issues of integrity in leadership, and the importance of continuity between speaking and acting
- Jesus' gospel call to his disciples to be servants invites them into the same humility that he consistently embodied. resonant with today's responsorial psalm

Possible scientific resources

- **The power of nursing for mothers and offspring**
 - Studies suggest that the positive effects of breast feeding extend long past the actual nursing period
<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/10/bonding-breastfeeding>
 - This scholarly article explores the psychological effects of breast feeding on mothers and their children including positive cognitive and emotional development <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6096620/>
 - This easy read provides an overview of breastmilk as a baby's jump start on immunity, autonomy, intelligence and other developments
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/moral-landscapes/201108/tremendous-benefits-doing-what-is-normal-breastfeeding>
- **The psychology of integrity**
 - This easy ready discusses the relationship between integrity and wellness
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beyond-school-walls/202304/the-integral-role-of-integrity>
 - There are various types of integrity, such as behavioral and attitudinal integrity
<https://psychology.iresearchnet.com/industrial-organizational-psychology/organizational-behavior/integrity/>
 - People who live with integrity demonstrate recognizable characteristics

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/insight-is-2020/201504/7-signs-people-integrity>

- **The importance of humility in leadership**

- Article from perspective of health care on the importance of humility for effective teamwork <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/fpm/issues/2018/0500/p25.html>
- This easy read considers the importance of “confident humility” <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/a-key-to-better-leadership-confident-humility/>
- A video and article on leadership humility from Oxford Review Encyclopaedia of terms <https://oxford-review.com/oxford-review-encyclopaedia-terms/leader-humility-definition-and-explanation/>

Homily outline combining insights about humility and nurturing mothers

- **Is humility un-American?**

- There is much evidence that we folks from the U.S. perceive ourselves positively
- A recent study indicated that we describe ourselves as friendly, thoughtful and careful. It also indicated that we feel confident in many aspects of our lives
- It is also true that we are sometimes perceived by others – employing the language from the 1958 literary blockbuster of the same name – as “ugly Americans”
- The impression of our arrogance is often projected by our citizens traveling abroad who do not take time to learn about the culture and customs of others
- Living in France decades ago I heard a compatriot complain about all the “foreigners” in Paris (i.e., Parisians)
- This is also a problem with U.S. companies marketing abroad
 - A classic example is American Motors releasing their “the Matador” car in Puerto Rico; meant to conjure strength and courage, in Spanish “matador” means “killer” – not appealing to most drivers
- More broadly, some argue that the decline in our international prestige is linked to our lack of national humility
 - E.g., politicians and officials often boast about our health care
 - A recent report of other high-income countries ranked the U.S. last in that category
- Closer to home, some suggest that a lack of humility is at the root of our national polarization and deteriorating civic discourse

- **Humility is good for business**

- There exist innumerable personal stories and well-founded research establishing that humility in corporate leadership
 - Increases levels of job satisfaction
 - Increases work engagement
 - Reduces emotional exhaustion
- Humble leadership was the strongest predictor of
 - Employee satisfaction
 - Improved performance of individuals and teams
- Not surprising humble leadership helps build relationships

- Makes you approachable
 - Instills a sense of mission
 - Instigates empathy
- **Nurturing relationality**
 - One of nature's great models of fostering relationality is cited by St. Paul today: a nursing mother
 - Multiple studies reveal that maternal nursing is so much more than feeding
 - Breastmilk, with its antibodies, anti-viruses, anti-allergies and anti-parasites
 - Builds a child's immune system
 - Prevents diseases and infections
 - But beyond the physiological, breastfeeding is a bonding ritual that anchors a child
 - Leading to better emotional development and stability
 - Protects against mental health problems and addictions
 - Contributes to higher intelligence and emotional security
- **Jesus' relational genius**
 - Jesus was neither a corporate executive nor a nursing mother
 - Yet he demonstrated key understandings of both that he continuously enacted
 - Resonant with humble leadership
 - And relational parenting
 - Today's gospel could be minimalized to an appropriate chastising of clergy
 - But doing so bypasses Jesus' own personal and leadership integrity
 - In his attitudes and actions
 - His integrity was a fundamental trait of his human manifestation
 - Consider his instinctive ability to lead by word and deed
 - Calling disciples friends not servants
 - Demonstrating empathy to marginalized and outcasts
 - Humbling himself unto death as a common criminal
 - Jesus was not an unassured or shy leader
 - Rather he exhibited what could be considered "confident humility"
 - Even when facing execution as a criminal of the state, proclaiming to Pilate "what you say is true"
 - He is our model as individuals, as local communities, and as a church
- **Catholic humility**
 - In our lesser moments, our faith community has not exercised a humility that nurtures
 - Vatican II set a new standard of respect and care for people of other faith traditions
 - Especially of our two great monotheistic siblings
 - Judaism and Islam
 - This graciousness mirrors Jesus' own nurturing generosity
 - To Samaritans
 - Syrophoenician women
 - And others outside his usual circle of followers
 - Pope Francis reminds us that "for leadership there is only one road: service If

you are not a servant, your leadership will fail.”

- **An American Tale**

- The renowned Black intellectual Booker T. Washington was stopped by a wealthy white woman as he walked by, and asked if he could chop some wood for her. He smiled, rolled up his sleeves, chopped and stacked the wood. A little girl recognized him and revealed his identity. When the embarrassed woman apologized he said there was no need: “It is always a delight to do something for a friend.”
- Jesus calls us to that same delight.

Tags: humility, leadership maternal care, nursing

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way’s sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.