

Homily 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 2026

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of God’ (Mt 5)

Cardinal Hume was one of the humblest men I have ever met. He had that ‘poverty of spirit’ which allowed him to abandon himself completely to the will of God. I first met him in 1972 when he was Abbot of Ampleforth College. My first impression was of a man, so humble, who made you feel you were the only person who mattered when he spoke to you. Later at London Colney, Westminster Diocesan Pastoral Centre in 1985, he took time to bless John Andrew our firstborn when he was only weeks old. He made Alice and I feel very special by this simple humble blessing of our baby. Whilst I was head teacher at St Michael’s Catholic High School, I met him several times and really got to know him quite well. He would turn up at the school in a rather threadbare barathea coat, no ‘airs or graces’, again a sign of his humility even as a Cardinal.

Prophet Zephaniah in describing the ideal Israel God desires, also describes the very virtues Cardinal Hume embodied: The Chosen People were called to be humble, lowly, just, obedient to God, truthful... The Responsorial Psalm’s response today is, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit it is to those the kingdom of God belongs.’ In Cardinal Hume’s humility and ‘poverty of spirit’, the kingdom of God was indeed already present to be perfected in the Second Coming.

St Paul in his 1st Letter to The Corinthians continues to emphasise, for disciples of Jesus, humility and abandonment to God’s holy will (poverty of spirit). Paul also offers some explanation as to why we have been called to discipleship: ‘Consider your calling: you were not wise according to worldly standards; you were not powerful of noble birth. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak and humble in the world to shame the strong.’

St Matthew’s Sermon on The Mount sees Jesus ascend ‘a mountain’ as the New Moses and proclaim 8 Blessings, the New Law of love. Matthew was writing for a mainly Jewish community and portrays Jesus as the fulfilment of The Old Testament Law (The Torah) and The Old Testament Prophets. The first Blessing is unsurprisingly for ‘the poor in spirit’, those who are humble and willing to abandon themselves to God’s holy will. However, if you want to fully understand Matthew’s Beatitudes please read the whole of Chapters 5,6 and 7 and you will find the thread running through the teaching of Jesus is that of humility and poverty of spirit, found in those who mourn, who are merciful, peacemakers, the pure in heart, the meek/humble, the just and in those who are persecuted in his name.

Humility, which means ‘of the earth’ (from which God created us) is not so fashionable a word nowadays. Dependence on God is perhaps even laughed at by some secularists. To be a merciful peacemaker or a person who tries to live a life of purity is often scoffed at. Yet these are the very virtues which establish God’s Kingdom on earth. I wonder what Cardinal Hume would have made of some modern-day politicians’, their egos, lies, war mongering, ruthlessness and brutality? St Luke when he writes his equivalent Beatitudes gives us some indication of Jesus’ position regarding those who manifest such selfish and hedonistic characteristics, ‘Woe to you who are obsessed with money; woe to you who live opulently; woe to you who seek earthly power and woe to you who manipulate my message to suit your own ends.’

In the final analysis, are we as Catholic Christians willing to stand up for the Jesus of The Gospel and be a ‘counterculture’ to the ‘I’m alright Jack’ ‘I can do what I want’ society, driven by individualism, materialism, secularism and consumerism? In short are we willing to stand up for humility and poverty of spirit? Cardinal Hume certainly did and that made all the difference!