

Pastor's column 25th week 2021

In 2013 James Kerr published a book on All Black culture and named it "Legacy." Fr Gerry Arbuckle sm, the priest-sociologist, once defined "culture" simply as "the way we do things around here!" The book's opening chapter is titled, "Character." Kerr identifies a key aspect of character and that is humility. He demonstrates this as part of the team's culture in this anecdote. After the 42-7 win against the Welsh in 2010 there was the usual immediate post-game celebrations, the 30,000 number crowd was dispersing, the media were doing their post game analyses and then he continues; "This is when something happens that you might not expect. Two of the senior players- one an international player of the year, twice- each pick up a long handled broom and begin to sweep the changing sheds. They brush the mud and the gauze into small piles in the corner.....the All Blacks themselves are tidying up after themselves. - Sweeping the sheds. Doing it properly. So no one else has to. Because no one looks after the All Blacks. The All Blacks look after themselves." (p 7). His subtexts to the title "Character" emphasise this aspect of humility. "Waiho ma te tangata e mihi" - Let someone else praise your virtues. "Sweep the sheds- never be too big to do the small things that need to be done." Jesus description of leadership in the Kingdom of God underscores humility as its key characteristic. Jesus holds up a little child as a counterpoint to ambition, status and pride, which so often motivate people in authority. He chooses a child, one too young for conceit, one, who one author states; "who has not passed the boundary between thinking his parents know everything and wondering if his parents know anything." The people, the Church eventually celebrate, are the saints who are noted for their humility, not institutional leaders, unless of course they too happen to be saints. Every archetype has a positive and negative connotation. The positive side of the child-archetype is imagination, spontaneity and directness and creativity. The dark side is regressive dependency, childishness and narcissism. God Himself demonstrates humility as expressed by St Paul : "His state was Divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross." (Phil 2:6ff) Psychological development from child to adult can parallel our growth in faith. Growth is often not linear but more like a spiral, visiting the same issues again and again but from a different perspective. As we grow we may notice different tendencies: the child to take, the adult to give; the child to escape fear, the adult to love fearlessly; the child to coerce, the adult to co-operate; the child to obey blindly, the adult has freedom of thought and remains open to other information. Humility and Truth are two sides of the one coin. Humility recognises that everything is gift and its fruitful prayer is "thank you!" The oft quoted story of our time is that of "the Emperor has no clothes." It could be the subtext of Douglas Murray's book "The madness of crowds." While everyone is lauding the "invisible clothes" of the Emperor out of fawning subservience and fear of displeasure or societal ostracism, the young boy exclaims, "He has no clothes!" Clarity of perception and accuracy of response is fruit of "child-likeness!" - a quality most, most needed in our time.