In today's reading, we hear that God exalts the humble and those who try to be exalted will be humbled. This is a concept that is difficult because in our society, being prideful and arrogant is often a sign of leadership and power. And time and time again, we see people who exalt themselves become even more exalted, not humbled. For example, Leona Hemsley, the hotel diva who died within the past few days, was a person whose life exhibited pride and power. In one of her memorable statements, she tells the world that she did not pay taxes because taxes were for the little people. Yes, her abuse of power and privilege led to jail time, but she emerged one of the wealthiest people in the nation. At her death, she left her fortune to her dog, ignoring two of her grandchildren who she left nothing. And then, we see Martha Stewart, who also abused power and privilege and also did jail time. Pundits say that Martha Stewart's jail time may have actually helped her career. After jail she received additional TV offers and her company bounced back financially. If God humbles those who exalt themselves, when is Martha going to get hers?

I have to say I have mixed feelings about Martha Stewart. I really like her products, however, yes, it appears she broke the law. However, I have a friend who lives in Westport CT who was trying to raise money to save a historical building. I suggested to my friend that she ask Martha Stewart to contribute toward the fund to save the building. My friend was hesitant. Isn't she going to jail? my friend asked. Yes, I said, so now she's got a lot of time and she appears to love her town so she might actually help. So my friend wrote a letter to the jail and Martha sent a huge contribution – huge. The house was saved and Martha is now rich and famous again. So, I have to say, perhaps Martha is not the best example of pride gone bad, perhaps, she is a good example of the exalted being humbled and the fruits of that humility was a wonderful gift.

But excluding Martha Stewart, it's hard to believe these days that that pride is bad and humility is good. It appears that the prideful are being very well rewarded with riches, fame and power. Sure, today's reading says that God will humble those who attempt to exalt themselves, but in today's society, we just don't see it.

Why do the prideful always seem to win in this world? Well, this is not a new phenomenon, for even in today's text we see that the prideful do win wealth and power by being unjust. In today's text, we read, "Sovereignty (or the Kingdoms of this world) passes from nation to nation on account of injustice and insolence and wealth." (Eccle 10:8) The rules for the Kingdoms of this world involve using pride, power and wealth to build empires. And as part of that empire building, injustice will happen and the humble will be hurt.

So, what's the advantage of being humble? Well, there is no advantage in this world to being humble. Nice guys finish last in the Kingdoms of this world. However, Jesus is not talking about the rules of this world when he is saying that the exalted will be humbled and the humbled will be exalted. Jesus is talking about the rules for the Kingdom of God. For in the Kingdom of God, the winners are the ones who are humble. Those who humble

themselves in the Kingdom of God will be exalted and those in the Kingdom of God who exalt themselves will be humbled.
The writer of Ecclesiasticus warns the readers that even though pride may provide some earthly gain, that pride is a sign of a person who has forsaken God and who has drawn their heart away from God their Creator. (Eccles 10:12) Forsaking God and withdrawing your heart from God is not a way of being exalted in the Kingdom of God. In the Psalms, we read that those who are exalted in the Kingdom of God are the ones who are close to the heart of God, the ones who fear the Lord and keep God's commandments, the ones who practice humility by dealing generously and conduct their affairs with justice. These humble ones shine like beacons of light for the upright. These residents of the Kingdom of God are the ones who gracious, merciful and righteous.

Unlike the proud, whose hearts are distant from God, the hearts of the humble ones are firm and secure in the Lord. Instead of robbing from the little people who pay taxes, the humble citizens of God's Kingdom are the ones who give to the poor.

These humble also are blessed with wealth and riches, but their wealth and riches were not stolen from others or taken through injustice. And the riches that they have, unlike the likes of Leona Hemsley, are shared freely among the poor.

God does not say that the humble will build kingdoms or empires. Nor does God promise that the humble will be exalted on earth, although some of them will have wealth and power. But God says that the humble will be exalted in the Kingdom of God. And God also says that the humble will be happy.

Do not under estimate the benefit of happiness. The proud people of our times are not known as happy people.

We are living in a time when the unhappy, sour but powerful people are paraded in front of us as role models. I am getting tired of the stories about Angelina, Paris, Brittney and Lindsay. I can hardly stand going to the grocery anymore, being forced to stand in line surrounded by magazines featuring unhappy faces of celebrities wasting their lives, their wealth and power and their time. Thank God for self serve check lines!

What we can do to counter this parade of the prideful is to remind ourselves of those beacons of light, those examples of humility, whose lives are characterized by their love for God and their love for others. In Hebrews, we are encouraged to look at these saints as examples of how to live lives of humility. (Hebrews 13:7) Remember your leaders, people like Mother Teresa of Calcutta or DJ Lemieux of Danvers, and remember those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Let's remember those heroes who loved God and their neighbor. Let us consider the outcome of their lives – lives like Mother Teresa who saved hundreds of orphans in Calcutta or DJ from Danvers who used a lemonade stand on the north shore to bring relieve to orphans with AIDS. Let us imitate those who exercise their humility through their love of God and the love of others.