

St Thomas Church
October 13, 2019
Trinity XVII
r mcneely+

*whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased
And he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

This is one of those Sunday's in which the Epistle, the Gospel, the other minor propers all cry out with one voice on a single topic unifying the service and demanding that this sermon fall in line.

That single voice is crying out: Christian Humility and so it is Christian humility of which I speak this morning.

'Humility' is a term we use with some frequency in our 21st Century lives but do we know it's Christian meaning and origin?

In the language of our day, the word humility is not a virtue.

Its Dictionary definition is now:

To have a low view of one's self.

And sounds like something our State teachers

Are tasked with stamping out or reporting to the school psychologist

Today to be of 'humble' beginnings is a polite way of saying; "not worth very much". Today's culture seems to place self well above humility.

Mankind in the 21st Century aspires to self,
 to self-gratification,
 even at the expense of others.

Too quickly people today see Humility as to be
 mealy-mouthed,
 to get stepped upon
 or to deny our talents and abilities.

It connotes weakness,
 something to be avoided,
 something that is the exclusive province of wimps.
 Something to be avoided at all costs

If that is 21st Century humility
 What is Christian Humility
 And why is Jesus focusing us on it?

Christian Humility is none of the things so reviled by 21st
 Century mankind. Rather, it stands as a bulwark against
 them.

I sometimes wonder
 whether the devil
 has not purposefully mangled our language
 to so twist the meaning of Christian language
 to separate us from God.

today's collect has a good example. The word prevent for
 centuries meant to go before. Literally the word consists of
 the prefix "pre" meaning before and "vent" from the Latin
 word meaning "to go". Hence, to go before.

So now armed with the original meaning; the sense of the collect- prayer is:

God's grace go before us
and follow us
to be constantly in His grace
to be given to all good works.

OK, back to Christian Humility

A Christian definition of Humility might be

To surrender to God
To let God rule our lives
To subject ones self to God
To serve the will of God in our lives

Christian Humility, in its true understanding is basic to Christian Doctrine and philosophy.

St Augustine once said:

“Should you ask me what is the first thing in religion,
I should reply that the first,
second
and third thing
is humility.”

And so, it is a foundational principal here at St Thomas.

Unlike some of our Christian brothers and sisters,
we kneel in prayer:

A gesture of humility
Reminiscent of ancient times when
People knelt before their King when in court.

It is a gesture of supplication
 Or submission to authority
 Can there be a higher authority than God?
 Sometimes we need to return to the origin of our words to
 regain understanding of them.
 No less than St Thomas taught, that
 ‘humility’ came from the Latin, root word: humus.
 Meaning earth as in dirt:
 but the good stuff,
 that rich soil that contains everything necessary for the
 plants to grow,
 that stuff we buy in bags and add to the dirt,
 the loam containing the nutrients that enable the seed
 to germinate and to grow.
 The thing of life itself.
 Our humility is that critical to the Christian way,
 our journey to God.
 It is the humus, the warm moist earth that nurtures the seed,
 the word of God,
 that allows it to grow in our hearts.
 Without our Christian humility, that seed withers and dies.
 It is that critical.

And so the word humility, or its variant is woven
 throughout the communion liturgy.

 It appears 9 times in the mass.
 You might listen for it in the next 20 minutes or so as we
 reach the Canon of the Mass.
 We say it so often that you may not have heard it
 or lost it in the poetry
 and metre of the language.

In the Gospel for the day, the story opens as Jesus is having Sabbath dinner at the home of one of the Pharisees. They bate him. It is the Sabbath and there is this man in need of healing. But the law as applied by the Pharisees precludes it. The law so revered by the Pharisees has perverted the spirit and heart of God and buried it with layers of regulation. They became so wrapped up in themselves and their legalistic opinions that they no longer submitted themselves to God. Jesus heals the man as a dramatic lesson that it is God's will and His love of all mankind to which we must in all humility submit ourselves.

Jesus then offers the parable that is in the context of the evening; a dinner party.

On its surface the parable seems to be good advice about which seat to take at the dinner party table. But it is much more. It is a parable about how to lead one's life. It is a parable that teaches humility.

Christian humility is the virtue
whereby we are truthful about ourselves and others
and are down to earth enough to recognize the source
of all that we are
and to submit ourselves to the will of God.

It is not that we are to falsely demean our talents and abilities; quite the opposite. We are to be honest and truthful about them.

But the key is that Christians recognize that those talents
are gifts from God
and, as gifts,
must be used to fulfill His will in our lives.

C.S. Lewis probably summarized it best:
“Humility is not thinking less of yourself
but thinking of yourself less.”

As in so many matters, the Earthly Life of Jesus is our
teacher.

He was incarnate as a servant,
Not a master.
He embodied and lived His life in Christian humility.
He owned nothing but was the creator of everything.
At every opportunity
He emptied himself.
Gave all that He had.

In the upper room at the Last Supper
On the night before He died, He washed the dirty feet of
the apostles, the lowliest task of the lowest servant.

St Paul said, “He humbled himself and became obedient
unto death, even the death of the cross”.

By His life, Jesus taught a new concept:
the way up is down,
to save your life you must first lose it.
To be exalted you must first humble yourself.

Martin Luther said; “God created the world out of nothing, and so long as we are nothing, He can make something out of us.”

Was Luther saying that we,
full of ourselves,
can never proclaim the Christ;
who emptied Himself.
Because there is no room for God
in a person who is full of themselves.

And so we again clash with our secular world
A world in which ‘self’ is put before all else
A world in which the sin of pride is the order of the
day.

Pride that elevates self above God
Pride that is the source
and leads to most sin.

Probably the best example of how pride works in us is that
of original sin, Adam and Eve.

All was in its proper order in the garden of Eden.
Adam and Eve in close union with God and all their
needs were met. They subjected themselves to God
But the devil/serpent suggested that they could be every bit
as powerful as God if they elevated themselves to God’s
level, disobeyed his one command and ate of the tree of the
knowledge of good and evil. It was pride that facilitated
their sin.

The Christian Virtue: Humility is the antidote to the sin of pride. Pride tries to reverse the Christian order

And puts us ahead of God in our lives.

Humility is the opposite and

Puts God first.

So how do we live in Christian humility?

We must be honest and truthful about ourselves,

acknowledge our strengths and abilities,

and our weaknesses

and our limitations

acknowledge that our gifts are of God

We must subject ourselves to God

Bow to His authority in our lives

Accept His will in our lives

And do all in our power to live by His Will

We must direct our strengths toward the will of God and

we must, with the Grace of God work to accept our

limitations

And work to overcome the weaknesses.

We must be humble, That is:

honest and truthful about God

and our relationship to Him.

When we are truly humble about ourselves,

we can honestly admit our radical dependence upon the

Lord,

our absolute need for His transforming grace in our lives.

That is true Christian Humility.

Jesus Christ has redeemed us by His death and resurrection,
that saving mystery we relive
in the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice,
that saving mystery being renewed
right now in our midst
as we receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

This Jesus is pleading for us before the Father,
pouring down upon us His merciful love.

Humility enables us to be receptive of that saving love
and to cooperate with the grace He sends us
so that more and more we can live as faith-filled
disciples
and then live forever with Him in the glory of Heaven.