

## Humility: The Forgotten Virtue

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **with all humility and gentleness, with patience**, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-6*

It seems that we are forever assessed. Students have their report cards. Employees have their performance reviews. The entrepreneur, intrigued by the thought of “being his own boss” beholden to no one, quickly finds out that he is subject to the customer reviews. The actor, author or musician reads his publically printed entertainment reviews. And then, at the end of life, there is one more at the judgment. There is no escape. 2 Corinthians 5:10 reads, “For all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ”. St. John reveals in the Apocalypse, the Christian has his “good works that follow him” (Revelation 14:13).

Now which of these works would you seek? Which descriptive words? Which of the virtues do you aspire to? Teachers like to see students who are: “inquisitive, analytical, thoughtful, and perhaps “peacemakers”. Employers like to see their workers: industrious, punctual, and team-players. The entertainment critic wants to see performers who are: innovative, inspiring and creative. The Almighty directs us, through his apostle Paul to *walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **with all humility and gentleness, with patience**, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-6*

You don't hear much about humility. It is the forgotten virtue. It is deliberately forgotten because it is the de-valued virtue. Political philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century considered it part of the slave morality. He would say, “Slave morality values things like kindness, humility and sympathy” while Master morality values

things like pride, strength and nobility". Never the twain shall meet. Many who never heard of Nietzsche agree with him. Humility is weakness. In the minds of many it is best left the forgotten virtue.

But let's be not too quick to disparage of humility. The one who embodied humility and exemplified the virtue best was the Son of God. And the Son of God, as we have heard, healed the leper, commanded the waves, cast out demons, raises the dead and will ultimately cause every knee to bow and every tongue to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord". It was the Christ who in the humility of death brought forth life. Yes, even in the depths of humility of being stricken, smitten and afflicted on the cross, he was raised up, to raise his followers up to wear a crown.

Nietzsche, who aspired to all that was prideful, strong and noble, unfortunately met an unhappy end. They say that near the end of his life at the sound of a whip, his nerves gave out and he could never write again.

But the One who was humility in the flesh, could with a look cause a rugged fisherman to weep over his sins. He could at a Word raise the widow's son at Nain. At someone's touch of the hem of his garment heal. There can be power and nobility associated with humility. In fact, to those who humble themselves, Jesus promises in the Gospel reading "will be exalted (Luke 14:11)".

Is the virtue of humility property of our Lord alone? Of course not! He bestows his gifts freely. He dispenses his righteousness to be worn as a wedding garment. And in that term righteousness, we mean the total holiness of his being. In the righteousness of Christ we have all 4 cardinal virtues. We have all theological virtues. We have all moral virtues. We have faith, hope, love, fortitude, justice, prudence and temperance. Numbers and categories of desirable virtues are

unquantifiable as the concept of the good or righteousness itself. But today, in God's Word, we hear emphasized in all three readings: "humility". It is a virtue but also a gift that Christ bestows.

His righteousness is to be worn as a wedding garment. It is a garment he freely gives and clothes us with. "We are clothed in the righteousness of Christ". It is as St. Paul says in Galatians 3:27: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ". It isn't without accident that in our epistle reading from Ephesians today we have discussion of the Christian walk connected with baptism. In baptism we don the righteousness of Christ which includes his humility.

This week's bulletin cover depicts that scene. Jesus stands behind a man, putting a clean white robe over the man's grimy soiled one. As we live in baptism, he does this time after time after time. He clothes us in his righteousness meaning besides 101 other virtues all those spoken of in our text: humility, patience, hope and love. In his righteousness we have life. In his garments of righteousness we have entrance to the wedding feast without end.

The soiled robe remains underneath. Baptism and the holiness of Christ are interjected into the believer's life but the sinful nature remains lurking below the surface. It is an epic struggle as we are both sinner and saint. But by our Baptism we have a fighting chance. In the course of our lives His humility, not only worn as a means of our salvation which we call justification, also carries the power to move from the exterior to the interior of our hearts and souls which we call sanctification. And in the sanctified life we may be blessed with all the fruits of faith: gentleness, patience, love and peace.

Heed the call to "follow in his steps". The call to a holy life is in today's reading. It stands as a challenge. Hear the call of the Lord issued through his humble servant St. Paul:

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For in humbling yourself you may be exalted. This is what the Gospel reading says. In the epistle we have the image of baptism. In descending into the waters you are raised up to new life. It is a new life in one faith, one hope, and one baptism.

And what a hope it is. As you continue to read Ephesians 4 what does Paul speak of? He first speaks of the ascension of our Lord. One of the chief parts of the Creed: “He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father”. In his ascension he carries the hopes of us all that we also may follow him, in the flesh, fully human with body and soul into the eternal realms to live with him forever.

What a hope it is. Even for this life what a hope it is. For in humility we develop a certain stability. In humility we are grounded. And we mature.

<sup>14</sup>so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup>Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> (Ephesians 4:14 ff.)

Indeed observe how the world struggles without the gifts of humility that give one a sound grounding. They are perched on the edge of their sofas falling prey to every charlatan that offers some life fulfilling dream. Just read this book. Just buy this product. Just join this club.

Just befriend this person. Just embrace this technology. Run. Run. Run. And it never seems to end. How Satan keeps his flock busy ever pursuing happiness but never finding it.

The American citizen recites his constitution saying, "I believe in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". But the true citizen of heaven can say "I believe in the fullness of eternal life, liberty and the sure and certain hope of happiness". His happiness is a sure and certain hope as surely as his resurrection is a sure and certain hope as his Lord's resurrection was the undeniable hope. No human constitution can guarantee that. But the Son of God who humbled himself in death, yes, even death upon a cross, shows his victory in rising up from such a death to bestow life on all believers.

It is an exciting life that begins now. For all baptized throughout the world this day and all who renew their baptism in churches across the world today. We invoked "Father, Son and Holy Spirit today". We renewed our baptism in the confession and absolution of our sins. We go to the marriage feast of the Lamb at his supper. We proclaim his life, death and resurrection. ...Christ has died! Christ has Risen! Christ will come again!

Amen.