

When the Lord Comes Near, He Humbles Himself

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⁵*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*
⁶*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*
⁷*rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*
⁸*And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Tell me, would you consider yourself to be a humble person? Now, if you say to me, “I do think I am a humble person. I mean, I know that I’m more humble than a lot of people. In fact, I may be the most humble person I’ve ever met. When it comes to humility, I am the best. There is no one who is more humble than I am!” Well then, I would say that you really aren’t all that humble. If you think about it, humility is not something you can really take pride in, or boast about, or you are not being very humble.

But even though humility is not something we should boast about, it is something we should strive for. It’s a quality that God is pleased with. In fact, it’s something that God wants us to show. How did the prophet Micah put it? He wrote, *What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.* (Micah 6:8). Or the words of St. Peter, *All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”* (1 Peter 5:5) Or the words of Jesus himself, *“All who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”* (Luke 14:11). Or even the words of our text for the day, *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves.* (Phil. 2:3-4)

Obviously, God values humility. God wants us to be humble. But it’s one thing for God to say, “Be humble.” And it’s another thing for him to show what true humility looks like. And fortunately for us, that’s exactly what God does. In the pages of Holy Scripture, God points us to his Son as a perfect example of someone who humbled himself. As we begin this season of Advent, our focus turns to the coming of one who was promised of old, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the one who has all the power and glory of God. And yet, the one who, for our sakes, set aside that power and glory, took on human flesh and blood, was laid in a manger, mocked, scourged and ultimately nailed to a cross—all while wearing title Emanuel, that is, God with us. Our theme for today:

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What we want to do today is to see how Jesus’ life here on earth provides for us the perfect model and motivation to display that same humble, selfless, servant mindset that Jesus displayed throughout his life. In fact, isn’t that exactly what Saint Paul says here in our text? How does the inspired writer put it? *In your relationships with one another, have the same as mindset as Christ Jesus.* The Greek word here is phroneo. It literally means to hold an opinion about something, to think in a certain way. The old NIV version translated this as “Your attitude

should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” The point is, true humility begins up here, with how we think—how we think about ourselves, especially in comparison to other people, our relationships with other people. How did Saint Paul put it in Romans 12 verse 3? *Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.* Isn't that right? True humility begins with having the right attitude about yourself. Having an accurate view of who you are and knowing what you deserve and don't deserve from God.

Well, there is no better model for that kind of mindset than Jesus. In fact, here in our text, St Paul goes into a beautiful description who Jesus really is. These verses contain one of the most complete descriptions of the two natures of Christ in all of scripture. Look at what Paul says. *Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God...* In other words, Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is, and always will be God. Jesus has a divine nature that is 100% God. What does Scripture say? *In Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. (Colossians 2:9).* And that means that Jesus, as God, has all the power and glory, all the authority of God almighty. The Bible attributes even creation itself to Jesus Christ. How does Colossians 1:16 put it? *For in him (namely, in Christ), all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. (Colossians 1:16).*

And yet, in spite of all of that power and authority that rightfully belong to Jesus, what was Jesus' attitude? Paul tells us even though Jesus was in very nature God, still Jesus *did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.* Or as some translations put it, “something to be grasped, something to show off.” In other words, Jesus did not feel like he had to flaunt that he was God. He didn't use his divinity for his own benefit. When he was out in the wilderness for 40 days without food, he didn't say, “You know what would really taste good right now? A cheeseburger!” When Jesus was caught in the storm out in the Sea of Galilee, he didn't say, “Why don't you guys stay here in the boat. I'm going to beam myself to the other side of the lake where there's a warm bed waiting for me.” No, Jesus didn't use his divinity for his advantage. Instead, Paul says, *he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* With those words, Paul is really describing two different, but related things about Jesus. Paul is describing what we refer to as Jesus' Incarnation and Jesus' Humiliation. Let's take a moment to review those two terms.

Jesus' incarnation, which Paul refers to with the words, “being made in human likeness,” is the fact that even though Jesus was true God from eternity, still, at the moment of his conception by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary, he took on a second nature, a human nature, and from that moment on, he was, and still is, 100% God and 100% man. We call that Jesus' incarnation, because the word incarnate means “to take on flesh”. With his conception, Jesus took on a human nature. In effect, God became a man. And as a human, Jesus possessed all the attributes of any other human being. He ate, he slept, he cried, he died. The only thing he didn't do was sin. What does Scripture say? *[Jesus] has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. (Hebrews 4:15)* That's Jesus' Incarnation. The divine nature took on a human nature to become the God-man.

But now, in addition to that miracle, which none of us can fully comprehend, Paul also describes something else that is unique to Jesus alone. It's called Jesus' humiliation. Now don't misunderstand that word humiliation. It's not that Jesus did something really embarrassing and was therefore personally humiliated by what he did. No, in this case, the word humiliation means that Jesus chose to humble himself. In fact, sometimes instead of the word humiliation, theologians use the word “Exinanition,” which refers to Jesus “emptying himself.” Paul says that

Jesus “made himself nothing.” In other words, during his state of humiliation, Jesus did not make full use of his divine power and glory. Jesus still possessed all the power and glory of God. He just didn't always use it. He didn't let others see it. You might say that for a time, Jesus mostly hid his true identity as God. Kind of like Clark Kent hid his identity as Superman. He covered up the “S” on his chest. Every once in a while, Jesus showed who he truly was. He raised someone from the dead or calmed the storm or allowed his face and clothes to shine like the sun. But for the most part, Jesus looked and acted like any other ordinary human being. That's what Jesus was like in his state of humiliation.

Now it's important to understand even though Jesus' incarnation and his humiliation began at the same time, namely, at the time of his conception in the virgin Mary, that doesn't mean they are the same thing. The fact that, in Christ, God became a man is not in and of itself an expression of God humbling himself. Think about it. Right now, Jesus Christ is still true man. Jesus still has a human nature even though he sits on the throne of Heaven. At this point, Jesus is no longer living in a state of humiliation. Now he's in a state of exaltation. Ever since his resurrection from the dead, Jesus' human nature is making full use of the power and glory of God. But during that time between his conception in the Virgin Mary, and his death and burial, Jesus set aside that power and glory. It's that time that Paul is referring to here in our text when he says, *and being found in appearance as a man*, (in other words, this is what Jesus looked like when people came into contact with him—in that condition, what did Jesus do?) *he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross*.

With those words, St. Paul is not only pointing out that in Christ, God became a man. He's emphasizing what Jesus did while he was a man here on earth. He's pointing out the attitude that Jesus displayed during his earthly ministry. He humbled himself. He became obedient to the point of death. And what's truly amazing is that he did this, even though he was God! Think about that a minute. God Almighty, the Lord of the universe, chose to insert himself into a microscopic little embryo and then spend nine months growing in the womb of a virgin mother. Talk about humbling yourself!

And the God who had every right to demand that Mary and Joseph obey him, instead turned the tables on them and put himself under their authority. No matter how menial the task that Jesus was assigned, he willingly obeyed it. When Joseph said, “Son, it's time for you to clean out the toilet,” Jesus, the very Son of God, cleaned out the toilet. Jesus willingly put himself under the authority of his parents. He put himself under the authority of the laws of Moses. He allowed himself to be circumcised on the 8th day. He put himself under the authority of the government. Even before he was born, he allowed himself to be brought to Bethlehem so he could be taxed by a Roman Emperor. Even though Jesus the King had every right to ride into Jerusalem on a chariot of gold, he chose to ride on the back of a baby donkey. Even though Jesus' was the master of the banquet, he chose the role of a slave and washed his disciples' feet. Even though Jesus was holy and blameless and had never said or done anything to hurt anyone, he allowed himself to be put on trial by a corrupt judicial system, and then scourged and crucified like a common criminal.

Mind you, Jesus allowed all those things to happen to him, even though he was and still is, God Almighty. Jesus is Lord of the universe. He has a throne in the mansions of glory, and yet, he gave it up so that he could do what? So he could become a servant? So he could make himself nothing? So he could become obedient to the point of death? Why would God Almighty do that?

The answer is simply this. He did it because of you. He did it because he loves you.

How did Saint Paul put it in 2nd Corinthians 8:9? *You know the grace*, (that is, the undeserved love), *of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich* (in other words, even though he had all the glories of Heaven), *yet for your sakes he became poor* (that is, he came into this world, lived a humble life, carried your sins to the cross), *so that you through his poverty might become rich*. In effect, Jesus traded places with you and me. He took our place and gave us his place in heaven. Because he humbled himself, one day we get to reign with him in heaven forever.

My friends, doesn't that fact have a powerful impact on our attitude, yes, our mindset about how we live our lives here on earth? If Jesus, the very Son of God, could set aside his glory, so he could better serve our needs, what better reason could we have to do the same for others? By his selfless, sacrificial service, Jesus has given us the model and the motivation to do exactly what Paul says to do here in our text, and that is to *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility value others better than yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each one of you to the interests of others*.

Now, exactly what that mindset looks like in your life, how it will impact how you treat people, what you set your sights on, the things you volunteer to do, and the attitude with which you do it, well, I guess that's for you to figure out in the week ahead.

May God bless your humble, selfless service, in response to the humble, selfless service that Jesus has offered to you and me first. In his name. Amen.