

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

How Could God be Humble?

There's an old country song that says, "It's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way." Of course, the song spoofs people who don't realize how egotistical they sound. People like that are hard to take. But how does a truly gifted person be humble? If you were a true genius and you clearly were the smartest person around most of the time, how would you show humility? It would obviously be a lie to pretend like you weren't gifted. But being gifted doesn't give you a license to throw it in people's faces or to be arrogant or to look down on other people. Even gifted people should be humble. In his letter to the Philippians, St. Paul says that our attitude should be like that of Jesus and he goes on to show how humble Jesus was. Of course, Jesus was the Son of God. St. Paul shows us God being humble. Does that surprise you? I don't mean to imply that I think God is arrogant. But how many times don't the Scriptures tell us to praise God? Who wrote those Scriptures? God did. God knows very well that we are nothing compared to him. His glory fills the whole earth, the Bible says. It would be false modesty for God the Father or his Son, Jesus, to pretend like he is anything less than the Lord of Glory. But the Son of God still is humble – as we see on Palm Sunday. What does that look like? **How could God be humble?**

I.

I always find the psychology of Christ to be baffling, because it's the psychology of a person who is God and man at the same time. How do you reconcile the all-knowing, all-powerful God with a human being, who by definition is not all-knowing or all-powerful? That makes it hard for us to understand what Jesus thought and felt, especially as he went through his sufferings and death. Our whole reading today is about Jesus' attitude. But except for the very first statement, it avoids unanswerable questions about what Jesus thought and felt and it focuses on what he did. **How could God be humble? By being willing to give up everything.**

That's what Paul says about Jesus. He doesn't begin with the manger in the stable at Bethlehem. He doesn't even begin in Nazareth when Mary showed up pregnant and her fiancé prepared to divorce her. Paul begins in eternity. He says that Jesus, "... **being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped ...**" What does "something to be grasped" mean? It's an effort to translate an obscure Greek word. Several other translations say that he did not consider equality with God something to be used for his own advantage. He didn't consider it to be a trophy to flaunt or something to insist on, at other people's expense.

Jesus was humble, even in eternity. He was the Son of God. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He is equal to his Father in every way. But he didn't let that go to his head. Instead, St. Paul says, "[He] **made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.**" Have you seen that TV show *Undercover Boss*? I've never watched it, but I gather from the commercials that it's all about bosses in big companies pretending to be peons and finding out what it's like to work at the bottom. I imagine they wind up doing the dirty work, the stuff that they'd never have to do on a day to day basis. In real life, how many corporate executives would cleaning up a bathroom where someone was just sick? They would say that's somebody else's job. They'd be right, of course. But in many cases, they would also give the impression that work like that is beneath them.

Jesus didn't do that. God the Son made himself nothing. The Greek word Paul uses here literally means that he emptied himself. He laid aside his glory as God and refused to fully use the power and even the knowledge that he had as God. Instead, he became a servant. He became one of us. God created us to be his servants. But that's not a bad thing. In fact, there's nothing better for us than to be God's servants. Jesus was

willing to become a servant like us to save us servants from death and hell. And the Bible even says that in heaven, he will serve us, even as we serve him with eternal praise.

But down here, being a servant doesn't usually sound like a good thing. We live in a sinful world. Jesus had to live as a servant, as a human being, in this world of sin. For the whole time that he was here, he laid aside the glory of God. Even when he used his power to do miracles and thus revealed his glory, never once did he use that glory for his own good. When he fasted for forty days and the devil tempted him to turn stones into bread, he refused. When the mob arrested him in the Garden of Gethsemane, he did use his power to knock them over – not to escape, but to show them that he was coming willingly to torture and death. When he was tried, he could've used his wisdom as God to silence his enemies or his glory as God to terrify his tormentors. But instead, he spoke only when it was necessary to uphold the truth of the gospel. Jesus humbled himself.

Paul says, **“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!”** He didn't live the way the Son of God deserved to live. That's clear on Palm Sunday. Jesus rode into Jerusalem at the head of a great throng of people who shouted and sang and cut palm branches to wave and to lay before him. This seems like a moment of glory right? But it wasn't really. It was more a mockery of glory. Jesus rode in like a king, but on a peasant's mount, a donkey, with no saddle and no honor guard – just a bunch of fishermen. The crowds cheered because God moved them to declare Jesus was his Son. But there was no real faith in that crowd. In five days, the crowds of Jerusalem chanted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Jesus humbled himself in all that he did here. Every step of his life was lowly and humble and finally he died the most humiliating death the ancient world knew how to give. In the minds of the people of that day, if a man laid down his life defending their people, that was a good death. If a person died with honor and dignity, that was a good death. But the cross was the worst death of all, not because of the pain, although that was horrible. But because the cross sent a message. To the Romans, the cross meant that this person was a slave and rebel, the worst kind of criminal. To the Jews it was even worse. The cross meant that this was a person whom God would abandon to hell. The Bible always focuses on the shame, not the pain, of the cross.

Jesus embraced that shame. My friends, would we be willing to humble ourselves like that? Our attitude should be like that of Christ Jesus who did all these things. How often are we willing to lay aside our pride and dignity and suffer shame and humiliation for others? I remember working in college in nursing homes and similar facilities, and many colleges students didn't last a week, because the work was just too dirty and gross. They felt it was beneath them. But it isn't just the dirty jobs that show our pride and sin. How often don't we hold grudges because we're angry that somebody did something that hurt me? How often don't we replay over and over again in our minds and hearts all the humiliations of our lives and rage against how unfair it all is? How often don't we lash out because we're hurt and we think our hurt justifies making someone else feel what we feel? That's pride, my friends, pure and simple. That pride is sin and it deserves hell.

Never once do you see Jesus doing any of those things. We can't be humble, so he lived the humble life that God requires of us. He did it perfectly every minute of his life. So God now sees us as perfectly humble. And Jesus humbled himself and suffered death, even death on a cross because he was paying for what our pride and sin deserve. God did abandon him to hell on the cross, to our hell, to the hell that every sinner on earth deserves. And he paid for us all. He paid for you and me. That's why he rode into Jerusalem that day.

II.

Jesus was humble enough to do all that. He gave up everything that he had in heaven so that he could come down here and live like that for us. The second half of our reading talks about Jesus being exalted. But it also contains another note of humility. In the first half of the reading, Jesus humbled himself, Jesus became obedient to death on a cross. But in the second half of the reading, Jesus doesn't do anything. He trusts his Father to do it all. **How can God be humble? By trusting another to restore everything.**

Why is that humble? Because Jesus doesn't push himself forward. A month or so ago, somebody sent me an invitation to join “LinkedIn,” the professional networking site. So I did. It keeps asking you to fill in different aspects of your professional experience. So I entered where I went to school and what positions I've held, both as a pastor and for the district. I even included articles that I've written. Then I started to wonder, am I guilty of sinful pride? Am I'm trying to impress people with what I've done? Jesus didn't do that. In the working world, you have to make a case for yourself. You have to demonstrate that you are the best person for the job, that you are too valuable to lay off. It's risky to trust that other people will make that case for you. But

that's exactly what Jesus did. He didn't exalt himself, not even after he was done with the suffering and humiliation. Instead, he trusted his Father to speak for him and to glorify him.

And Paul says, **"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name."** Jesus deserved that. He had humbled himself and defeated sin and death and hell and he deserves all the glory he receives in heaven and on earth. But there was also another reason for God to do this: so that we can see that he did achieve all those things. So that we trust in the only Savior who can bring us home to heaven. Do you believe people when they brag about their own accomplishments? People want to impress other people. When they claim something about themselves, it's always nice to have somebody else back up their claim. When someone submits a resume, it's somebody's job to verify all the claims they make in that document. Jesus doesn't have to make any claims to us about what he has accomplished. God the Father makes those claims for him. God the Father certifies that all that Jesus said about himself is true.

How did he do that? By raising him from the dead. By seating him at his right hand in the position of power and glory as God. Jesus is in the highest place and his name is greater than any other name on earth, so that, as Paul says, **"at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."** Every person in heaven and on earth and even in hell will kneel before Jesus and confess that he is the King. Every angel and every demon will acknowledge that he is who he always claimed to be. Of course, we'll get to do that. We do it now in every hymn we sing, but we're going to do it on Judgment Day and for all eternity afterward. And it will be pure joy. We will sing and confess what is in our hearts for all eternity. But we won't be the only ones confessing. The enemies of Christ will also have to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. For them, it won't be a joy. It will be part of the punishment for their pride and sin. But it will still bring glory to Christ and to his Father. It will show that his plan has been successful. It will proclaim that Jesus won.

Jesus won, because he was humble. In the end, true humility is nothing more or less than entrusting ourselves to God. Pride always thinks that I can do it. Humility puts our lives in his hands. Jesus did that. He trusted his Father's plan and came here and became one of us and he lived and died for us. Jesus trusted his Father and rose and ascended into heaven and let his Father proclaim his victory to us. His attitude of trust has saved us. And it is the model of the humble trust that God calls us to display now and forever. Amen.