

Saint Thomas' and St Thomas' of the Air Church  
 Trinity XVII  
 September 26, 2021  
 rmceely+

*he that exalteth himself shall be abased  
 and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

Did you get lost in the Collect for this week?

And wonder why in the world we would pray

That God's grace

“*prevent* and follow us”?

Did you wonder whether the ancients sometimes got hold of some bad wine

That altered their brains?

As originally used, the word “prevent” had an entirely different meaning

Let's break it down

The prefix “pre” means “before”

And the suffix “vent” comes from the Latin: “venio”

Meaning “to come”.

So the original meaning of prevent was; “to come before”

And today we might say; “precede.”

With that clarification, the prayer suddenly has meaning;

“Lord, we pray that thy grace may always *precede* and follow us.”

Was it innocent cultural evolution that destroyed the meaning of our prayer?

Or something more malevolent?

I leave it to your good judgment.

There is another word in the propers for this week

(propers are the Collect, Epistle and Gospel)

that has mutated from its origins

and separated us from Christian meaning and doctrine.

The word is “humble”.

And is at the heart of the message Jesus is sending today.  
In fact humility is the focus of both the Epistle and the Gospel

This week,

And this is one of those Sundays in which the Propers are so aligned  
That they cry out for a sermon.

And so, it is ‘humility’ about which I wish to speak this morning.

‘Humility’ is a term we use with some frequency in our 21<sup>st</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> Century aspires to self,

to instant 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 that is the exclusive province of wimps.  
Something to be avoided at all costs

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

Christian Humility is none of the things so reviled by 21<sup>st</sup> 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  
in order to separate us from 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 in our gardens,

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.

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

C.S. Lewis probably summarized it best:

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself  
but thinking of yourself ... less.”

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?

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 have become numbed to it  
    or lost it in the poetry  
    and meter 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.

There is this man in need of healing  
but it is the Sabbath  
and 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 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 brutally 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 brutally 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.

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 was the creator of everything but owned nothing.

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 loose 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 already 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.

