

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Trinity XVII
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rmcneely+

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

Let me step aside from the sermon for just a moment and explain the Collect for today.

It must have given you pause.

In it we pray that God's grace may always *prevent* and follow us. That word *prevent* needs some discussion.

You see, it is one of those words whose meaning has changed
Over the centuries.

In order to understand it; let's take it apart.

Two syllables:

Pre

And vent.

The prefix 'pre' means before.

The second syllable 'vent' is from the Latin 'venio'

Meaning: "to go".

So the original meaning of prevent was; "to go 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 and make us continually to be given to all good works."

So we can now turn to the Summer Trinity Survey of Essential Christian Doctrine in today's Gospel.

whoops.

But wait,

There is another word there that will trip us up.

The word is: “humble”.

And it is at the heart of the message Jesus is sending today.
‘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
As it is in Christian doctrine.

Its Dictionary definition is now:

“To have a low view of one’s self.”

And sounds like something our State teachers
Are expected to stamp out their students
or report to the school psychologist.

Today, to be of ‘humble’ origins 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 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 ignore our talents and abilities.

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

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 reviled by 21st Century
mankind.

I wonder sometimes
whether the devil
has not purposefully mangled our language,
to so twist the meaning of Christian language
to try 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.

Humility 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 today's Gospel, 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 as revered and applied by the Pharisees
has perverted the spirit and heart of God
and buried it under 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 of
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,
as well as 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, here 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.

