

Humble Yourselves...

Third Sunday After Trinity
(From the Epistle: *1 St. Peter v. 5.*)

5. ...all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 6. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 7. Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. 8. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 9. Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. 10. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. 11. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The key word in today's sermon is "humble": *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God* (vs. 6a). The word in the original Greek is an interesting one. It is the same word used of being "brought low with grief, depressed" (from *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*). It can also mean "not rising far from the ground". The word *humility* (from vs. 1) means "having a humble opinion of one's self; a deep sense of one's (moral) littleness; modesty,...lowliness of mind". It can also be "affected and ostentatious humility", used in what the Bible calls "false (or "voluntary"-KJV) humility" (NIV-Colossians 2:18).

Remember how we concluded, before Trinity Season began, that the choices which the BCP offers for Epistles, Gospels, and the Lectionary for this period of the Church calendar are meant to be instructive of Christian doctrine? In the bulletin on May 28th I included excerpts from an article by Rev. David Phillips in which he suggested that the Trinity readings are meant to lead us to "growth in holiness". Last week the Epistle concerned the virtue of "love". This week, it's "humility", and next week, it's "hope".

St. Peter reminds us that the very best possible place to be is, in fact, as close to the ground as possible. Children, you may have noticed, recover from their hard falls much, much better than we adults. They have, after all, less distance to fall. The impact is softer. They land easier. They are more resilient, and less rigid. In the presence of God, the Apostle warns us, it is best to keep as low as possible. In fact, flat on our faces might not even be quite low enough! We kneel in prayer to keep low. The ceremony of ordination to the priesthood, as we will see, involves a few moments of complete prostration. But the attitude of the body, of course, is only meant to display an attitude of heart. If we are not bowed in heart and mind, no physical posture will make it happen, even if others around us are fooled by our convincing actions.

And yes..., humility before God is to be accompanied by humility toward men. We can't have one without the other. A display of humble piety is easy, compared to the often grim and painful exercise of learning to humble ourselves before people. It looks good, after all, to appear religious. But to risk the possibility of being considered a "door mat", or of being taken ad-

vantage of by others, of being stepped on or thought little of is generally not a happy prospect for any of us. "I'm not your steppin' stone!" was the resentful refrain of a popular tune.

But the Scriptures do not require of us any difficult discipline which is not plainly, generously rewarded. Today's Epistle promises us *grace*, which means the blessing of God, and power from Him to perform His will. Further, we are promised *exaltation in due time* (6b). Through the exercise of pride, we sought to gain everything we wanted for ourselves by our own power, whether position, or fame, or high standing, or respect, or regard. These are the treasured possessions of those who have no faith. All the world yearns after them, and emulates those who seem to have arrive there. It is a tiresome, useless exercise that consumes the lives of so many around us. But if we take the downward path of humility, we are promised by God Himself the very things we yearn for, but when He gives them, they are "non-toxic". Power and position gained through selfish pursuit come at a great price --that of a defiled conscience-- because such goals are generally realized only at the expense of others. But when God adds respectability, stature, bearing, beauty to a soul, they are gifts that can be enjoyed and used without the guilt associated with goals that are achieved by very poor means.

Note also this very significant point: victory through suffering, and humiliation, and the assaults of the invisible enemy of our souls, are also the consequence of *humbling ourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God*. We are to accept trials and hardships lying face down before God, not angrily, defensively, defiantly, with fists raged, in a defensive posture, ready to take on all comers. Even the greatest malice that the Devil can throw against the Church, the worst hatred he can muster, is carefully metered, as it were... --watched over, measured, limited-- by the sovereign hand of *the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus* (10a). In other words, those things that act precisely against our pride --to reduce us in our own eyes; to humble us before God, ourselves, and others; to destroy our self-confidence and reliance, are, if we will but allow them and accept them, the means by which God will *make us perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle* (10b) us.

These truths run directly counter to --180 degrees opposite-- the prevailing mantras of the day, even within the Christian community, where advancement, achievement, skillful expedience to effect one's own ends, are promoted, popularized, and glorified.

No... The Way of the Cross is down, down, down; lower, and lower still. As Christ came down to Earth, from infinite heights to the profoundest depths, so must we go. It is willingness to travel in this direction that ultimately assures major progress in exactly the opposite direction.

To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (11).

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.