

## Palm Sunday 2023

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2.5)

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

The story is told of Queen Elizabeth who was out for a walk in the hills near her Scottish castle at Balmoral, dressed in everyday casual clothes. Two American tourists approached her and asked if she had ever met the queen. Quick as a flash, and no doubt with a twinkle in her eye, she motioned to her bodyguard and said: “I haven't, but that man over there meets her regularly.”

Delighted, one of the hikers put his arm around the body-guard's shoulder and asked if he could have a picture of the two of them together. He then handed his camera to the queen and said, 'Can you take a picture of us?'"

The queen obliged, and then her body-guard took the camera and took a picture of her with the two hikers! Oh to have been a fly on the wall when those photos were shown to families and friends! Although her outward appearance had changed since she was incognito in casual wear, her identity did not. She was still the Queen. This is an important point as we try to understand this morning's Epistle.

In it, St. Paul says that Christ was in the “form of God” but took upon Himself “the form of a servant”. In the Greek, this word “form” has different meanings. On the one hand it can mean “the essential form which never changes” -- the core, the true nature of something – ‘*morphe*’. On the other hand, there is the outward form or ‘*schema*’ which may change from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance. (Barclay) So, in the story just told, the Queen's *schema* or outward form changed, but her *morphe* or true nature did not.

Part and parcel of this conversation is the word ‘emptied’: “(JESUS) counted it not a prize to be equal to God, but *emptied* Himself”. What does that mean? Well, let's take the initial phrase, first: “He counted it not a prize to be equal to God”. The English Standard Version puts it this way: “Christ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped”. In other words, He did not think His divinity something to be used for His own advantage. One of the sentences used to introduce the Offertory in the Holy Communion speaks of this as well: “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich”. (2 Cor. 8.9)

This ‘putting aside’ of His riches or ‘emptying’ as the Epistle says, does not mean the Christ Jesus stopped being God. He emptied His own will for His Father's will. He emptied His outward form or schema, not His Divine essence. St. Leo the Great put it this way: “Invisible in His own nature, the Son of God became visible in ours. Beyond our grasp, He chose to come within our grasp. Existing before time began, He began to exist in a moment of time. Lord of the universe, He hid His infinite glory and took on nature of a servant.” We speak of this ‘emptying’ each

week in the Nicene Creed: *“Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”*

The holy Mystery of Who Jesus is and what He did – His morphe and His schema -- are set forth for us by the two candles on the Lord’s Table. Two lights, two flames – one for His Divinity as the Son of God; the other for His humanity, as the Son of Mary. And yet, these two natures of Christ are united in His one Person. He is both Divine and human, both God and Man, in one Being. So, when He stooped down from Heaven and was born of the Virgin Mary, He did not stop being God, He just added our humanity to His divine nature.

If you are still with me, I invite you to turn to page 699 of the Prayer Book. The second Article of Religion lays all of this out:

“THE Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all the actual sins of men.”

We come now to the “so what?” question – “So what does the emptying of Christ mean for me?” St. Paul says that it should cause us to change the way we think: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” And that’s the thing: what we have considered this morning requires a more than a nod, or a check in the box. On the contrary, we are called to worship Him and to confess His Lordship: “God hath given Him the Name which is above every name; that at the Name of JESUS every knee should bow...and every tongue confess JESUS CHHRIST IS LORD, to the glory of God the Father.”

In order to change the way we think, and in order to truly worship JESUS as LORD, we must open our hearts and acknowledge our excessive pride – the kind of pride I take in my possessions, my accomplishments or my place in life. The kind of pride that attributes self-praise, and acknowledges God’s part in an off-handed way, or not at all. Today’s Epistle calls for a 180 degree turn in our lives, and so do the Passion Gospel readings this week. By going over the agonizing details of what JESUS did for us, we are meant to reflect on what we really are; and that necessarily involves examine our ambitions and motivations for pride.

One preacher used this illustration to emphasize the danger of not making this careful examination and changing our course:

“There was once a great imperial empire, carrying its civilising sway over half the world, proud of its power, proud of its public spirit, proud of its justice: it knew the high arts of government; it not only conquered, it taught people law and gave them the mighty language of jurisprudence. It also taught the majestic languages of art, philosophy and science, including mathematics,

medicine, anthropology, and engineering. It was the proudest of empires, and has never had its equal. But pride brought with it vice and cruelty and corruption, and extravagant luxury, and savage greed which could not be satisfied. The great people whose boast had been of freedom and simplicity of life became the Babylon of the Apocalypse. The proud empire was destroyed and it fall shook the foundations of human society.” (Dean Church)

Like the Roman Empire, our hearts are susceptible to pride. The Lord warns us of this in that familiar verse from the Book of Proverbs: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (16.18) As we think about today’s Epistle and of JESUS’ humble entry into Jerusalem on a donkey in order to be falsely arrested, humiliated and killed for us, we are called to be honest with ourselves. Who are we really? And what are we compared with the greatness and holiness of God?

Christ humbled Himself and became obedient unto death for us because we were unable to help ourselves; unable to save ourselves; unable to fix ourselves; unable to cleanse our guilt and unable to solve the problem of death. “Let this (same) mind be in you,” Paul says. Why? Because in this mindset you will find life.

Jesus said, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it”. It is not in the ‘holding onto power and independence and respectability’ that will save us; rather it is in the ‘letting go’ – in the emptying of our will, and the acceptance of His will that we will discover new life and true joy.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...