May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our redeemer. Amen. You know, there are many differences between the British and the Americans. Uh, some of them are quite quaint and make me smile. Uh, for example, uh, here there's a sport where 80 different players can take part in a game, but only four of them ever kick the ball, and it's called football. Over there, football is a game you play with, you know, your feet. In the US, candidates in an election run for office. In the UK, they stand for office. That's interesting, isn't it? And here, public schools are called public schools, and independent schools are called independent schools. But in Britain, public schools are called state schools, and independent schools are called public schools. Insane, but harmless in a quirky kind of way. One of the most striking differences between over there and over here is the way people receive compliments. Over there, well, they don't actually receive compliments. It's way too vulgar to concede that you may have done something well or that your shirt looks nice. So in Britain, when someone congratulates you on a great piece of work, you say, "It was nothing." If you aced a test, you say, "You just got lucky with the questions." And if you win a game, you talk about how well your opponent played, and they were unlucky to lose. And if you ever hear a British preacher deliver an excellent sermon, you should not tell them so. No, you should just give them a check. Now in the US, you accept compliments much more easily. You say, "Thank you." You graciously acknowledge the truth that, yes, you did play well, uh, you did do a great piece of work, and yes, your hair does look rather gorgeous today. I think it comes from the British class system. You know, you're born upper, middle, or lower class, and you can't change your status, so you don't deserve any credit or discredit. It's out of your hands. The US, in theory at least, is a meritocracy. If you do something well, you receive a reward. If you are enjoying pleasant circumstances, it's because you deserve to. I remember the first time I came across this in Michigan. I was invited to the lavish home of a local judge. He had a huge and splendid house

filled with fine things, and I said, "You have a beautiful home." And he replied, "Thank you," which kind of shocked me. Uh, and I thought, "What do you mean thank you? That's a bit arrogant, isn't it?" Now, if I'm right, that means there's a sin that the British are more prone to committing than Americans. It's false humility, giving the appearance of being humble when you're secretly as proud as a peacock. So how do you know when someone is genuinely humble? Well, Saint Paul tells us in today's epistle reading have the same mindset as Jesus Christ, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross God chooses to stoop to the level of created matter, emptying himself of divine qualities and being born as a human baby. By right, the second person of the Trinity owns all things, controls all things, is Lord of all things because he made all things. Then he gives up all things. He does not cling selfishly to his equality with the other persons of the Trinity, but becomes a servant, not just the servant of God, but the servant of human beings. The creator becomes the servant of the creatures. He submits his will and his welfare to the fickle minds and the depraved plans of sinful men and women, not out of duty or obligation, and not because he's trying to impress us with his sacrifice. No, Jesus takes the role of a servant and goes to the cross out of sheer, unbridled, and passionate love for all people in all of time Now this passage in Philippians is not actually about Jesus. Uh, sure, the few verses I just quoted are about him, but when you read them as part of the whole letter, Paul's point is not so much about Christ as about the way his followers should be. Paul is calling us to model our lives on Christ. So the passage starts with this instruction Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of

others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ. Churchill was once asked at a press conference, "Doesn't it thrill you to know that every time you make a speech, the hall is packed to overflowing?" And Churchill replied, "Whenever I feel this way, I remember that if instead of making a speech I were being hanged, the crowd would be twice as big." Paul implies that true humility comes from viewing the needs of others ahead of our own desires. Now, the danger of humility is that we can believe we have to be doormats, deny our own needs and our human dignity. But all it is is choosing to relegate our wishes below the needs of other people. That is greatness. Greatness is not measured in medals, titles, and names on buildings. It's not assessed in GDP, the harvests of golden fields, or the gleaming splendor of cities I give thanks for the history and tradition of St. John's. Uh, do you know why? Uh, because in our Maundy Thursday worship, we don't have a foot washing, uh, ritual, and we are not going to change that tradition either Because when we modern-day Christians wash feet on Maundy Thursday, we miss the whole point and, in fact, end up doing the opposite of what Jesus did when he bent down and served his disciples at the Last Supper. Foot washing, for them, was a task reserved for the lowliest household servant. It was disgusting. It was an unthinkable task for anyone but the least powerful and the least honored member of the household staff. So when Jesus did it, he's making a profound statement of his humility. When today's clergy do it, they are not performing an act of extreme humility. Everyone has come to church having just washed their feet, sprayed them with cologne, clipped their toenails, and put on clean socks. The feet to be washed don't need it. They're pristine and fragrant. If the pastor is really going to stoop and do for the people an act of abject humility, he or she would go to people's houses and clean their toilets. We have made foot washing holy and religious. We've made an act of humility into a task reserved for people of privilege and authority, exactly the opposite of what it was when Jesus did it Jesus had the right to lord it over people. Of course he did. He was God. But he

chose not to, from the position of security, knowing who he was and what he was worth. Not depending on what other people thought of him. Not at all bothered by his reputation. Seeing himself with sober judgment. Seeing yourself with sober judgment. Being honest with yourself about your weaknesses and failings, and giving thanks to God for your gifts and strengths Philip Brooks, the once Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts, defined the way of humility well when he said, "The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is." We get that true vision of our greatness and our smallness when we stand back to back with Christ, not when we do it with each other. This is GLP-1 for your ego. Comparing ourselves to each other is foolish and the road to spiritual pride. But the path to being humble is this: comparing ourselves with God. Then we get a true picture of ourselves, fallen sinners prone to making a mess of things, but God's own children made in his image with immeasurable dignity and beauty reflecting his glory On November the 21st, 1916, Franz Joseph, Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, formerly the Habsburg Empire, breathed his last. He was the last Has-Habsburg Emp- emperor to die. It was just three years until the end of the First World War and the dissolution of that kingdom. The writing was on the wall. The empire's days were numbered, and a few days later, all the pomp and pageantry of that 400-year-old kingdom was displayed for the last time. Franz Joseph's funeral finished with his coffin being processed through the streets of Vienna to the church of the Capuchin monks, where heads of state were traditionally buried. When the procession reached the doors of the church, a member of the funeral party cried, "Open!" And from inside, the abbot called back, "Who are you? Who asks to enter?" The reply came back, "We bear the remains of His Imperial and Royal Highness Franz Joseph I, by the grace of God, Emperor of Austria, Apostolic King of Hungary and Bohemia, King of Lombardy and Venice, King of Jerusalem, Archduke of Austria, Grand Duke

of Tuscany, Duke of Salzburg, Grand Prince of Transylvania, Margrave of Moravia, Duke of Silesia, Princely Count of Habsburg, Count of Sonnenberg, Lord of Trieste," and so on for 40 titles. The abbot responded, "We know him not. Who goes there?" This time, the voice bellowed a much shorter list of the emperor's titles, but again, the reply came, "We know him not. Who goes there?" Finally, the spokesman answered, "We bear the body of Franz Joseph, our brother, a sinner like us all." And at that, the doors of the abbey swung open, and the abbot called out, "You may enter." The truly great say Paul and Jesus are those who believe they are not Bob Dylan sang, "May you climb a ladder to the stars. Climb on every rung, and may you stay forever young." I never disagree with Dylan about anything, but on this I do. The Christian ladder of success starts at the top and goes downwards. We are called to be downwardly mobile. So this week, get off your high horse and onto your low donkey. Climb down that ladder and join Christ at the bottom in humility. Amen.