

Sermon #1,260: Philippians 2:5-11 (Historic Epistle)
4-9-17, Lent 6: Palm Sunday, Bethany-Princeton MN
(Hymns: #277, 279.3, 331.1-5.10, Te Deum, 280)
(children: #279:1; "Do You Know Who Died ...", 378.1.5-7)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT CHRIST HUMBLLED HIMSELF?

Prayer: O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Almighty, who humbled Yourself and took upon Yourself the form of a bondservant for our sakes: We beseech You, help us by Your Holy Spirit not to be offended at Your lowliness, but heartily to believe that by Your obedience even unto the death of the cross You have redeemed us from the wrath of God and from eternal death; and keep us, we pray You, steadfast in this faith and in Christian humility, that we also may finally be exalted with You and be made partakers of Your glory; in Your name we pray. Amen.

The Text, Philippians 2:5-11 (v. 8). ⁸ **And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.** Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth.

In the name of Jesus, who went to His Passion for us all:

This is one of the most important Bible texts that you can know, our epistle lesson for today, Philippians 2:5-11. It is a section that my seminary professor Wilhelm Petersen made us learn by heart. In the early church this was used as a creed of sorts. It is the true confession of Jesus Christ.

It comes to us in our liturgy on Palm Sunday because it sets us up for all the events of Holy Week. This epistle reading is important, because it tells us what all of these events mean. It is saying:

"You are about to hear how Jesus was acclaimed king by the people of Jerusalem; but then, only 4 days later, how He was betrayed by one of His own, arrested and bound as a criminal; how He was denied and forsaken by His friends; how He was condemned by His own people, and then placed under the judgment of the secular government whose authority originally comes from Christ; how He was treated with hatred, and mocked as a silly fool; how He was beaten, spit upon, slapped, and tortured; how He was crowned with thorns, sentenced to death, and delivered up to be crucified; how He was nailed to a cross, forsaken by God, verbally abused while on the cross and remained on the cross until He died.

“If you want to know how this could happen to Him if He was God, who has all power in heaven and earth, we will tell you now – before you hear these details – why this happened and what it all means.”

The answer is in these words: **“He humbled Himself.”** Although it looks like everyone did what they wanted to Him, others did not humble Jesus. This says He humbled Himself.

When we hear that Jesus humbled Himself, it is natural for us to think that His humiliation consisted in becoming man, that He was coming down so far from heaven, this was His humiliation. But it wasn't. He certainly did come down lower when He condescended to become man.

But when Christ became man, He didn't become less. He was still God. So in the Athanasian Creed we say that He did not change from God into man – He didn't become less – but He *“took the manhood into God.”* It means whatever He did as a man, His nature as God shares in it.

In these verses St. Paul makes the point that “humiliation” isn't properly part of Christ's existence. He was and is **“equal with God,”** Paul says, and he also says it isn't **“robbery”** – in other words, Christ doesn't make a false claim to this honor. He is equal with God. Nobody else can say that. He is really “something” in a sense nobody else is. We think we have honor and dignity. We have our pride, we say.

But Christ alone properly deserves all honor and glory. In the days of His flesh He still had all His divine glory and power as God. But, **“He humbled Himself,”** means – as our catechumens learn – that He chose not to fully use His majesty and strength as God. Although He showed it in a limited way in His miracles, He laid His divine glory aside. He did not display it or assert Himself.

This is what St. Paul is explaining in the words leading up to *“He humbled Himself.”* Another translation of verse 6 says it well: **“Although He was God, He did not consider His being equal with God as a prize to be displayed”** (GWN). That is what Jesus is being tempted to do throughout His Passion, when He was tempted the hardest and in fact was going through a temptation bath. He was being tempted to display His divine power, to assert Himself, to not humble Himself anymore, to

stop His humiliation and assert or exalt Himself and be treated as He truly deserved as the Son of God, not to be treated as He didn't deserve.

You know what happens when you're tempted like that: when someone disrespects you, when someone else gets noticed and you don't, when someone pushes your buttons. We have no divine power to display. But we're tempted all the time to assert ourselves, to have our ego stroked, even to indulge ourselves. In many ways we put our desires and wishes first. You assert yourself. Instead of lifting you up it brings you down. Looking back this is your shame, what sinful pride caused you to do to others and ultimately to yourself, lacking humility and refusing to put others before yourself and failing to consider your works to be nothing, instead pursuing self-promotion and competing for credit and favor.

Yes, we have our pride, our sinful pride. We aren't easy to humble. Why else do you get so impatient? And it's easy to get angry! We are easily motivated by selfishness. It's behind every sin. We get defensive about our sins; that alone shows our need to be humbled. The worst part is that we don't see it, really we won't see it, or admit it. And when you think of being humiliated, it's one of the things we avoid like the plague. We will go to great lengths not to be humiliated, even being dishonest about what we've done - at the worst lying, or at the least leaving out facts that would humiliate us. We can't face the truth of how low we go sometimes. We look away from it. We refuse to be humbled or humiliated.

This is why St. Paul writes: **"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."** Because that mind isn't in us as it should be. But then he writes something encouraging. He has us look away from ourselves, to see Jesus: **"He did humble Himself."**

Christ became lowest of the low. He suffered. His humiliation is not just that He became a man and had a human nature. But it's what He did with the human nature. St. Paul says it this way: he was like **"a bondservant"** - a slave, actually. In other words, Christ being humiliated meant He did not act like the God He really was. He properly deserved all honor and glory, but He got only suffering and shame. He laid aside the full use of His divine power. He let it go so it could hardly be seen. Instead - as we see during the course of this week's services - He was weak, taken

advantage of, despised (all the things we resist), was brutalized but **“to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”** This is how He wanted it. **“He made Himself of no reputation,”** it says. Humiliation shouldn't properly be His lot, but He made it that way.

In doing this He shows us how we humiliate ourselves with our sins. He was humbling the human nature He shares with us. He was showing how low we go, how low our sins take us. It is truly a sad sight!

But then this shows us something so wonderful. Jesus' humiliation leads to something. St. Paul says, **“Therefore”** – which means, “because of this,” because of Jesus being so thoroughly humiliated – **“God also has highly exalted Him!”**

Jesus was already highly exalted from eternity. So why does it say that now He is highly exalted? What's the difference? His human nature. Now He has the name “Jesus,” as it says here, **“the name which is above every name,”** which the apostles say is **“the only name under heaven, given among men, by which alone we are saved.”** This is the important part. *Jesus* means “Savior.” The name Jesus connects Him to us.

What I'm leading up to is this: If Jesus is exalted, if He is now on high, if in His resurrection He began again to fully use His divine power and glory and walk in newness of life, then His human nature – the one He shares with us – is exalted too and we walk in newness of life. It means our human nature is highly exalted, you are **“highly exalted!”** When we say He did not change from God into man but *“took the manhood into God,”* it means not only did He not become less but He made us more.

Because His divine nature shared in what His human nature did, it is a true statement that when He suffered and died God suffered and died – and that means we are exalted! Luther said: *“If it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man, we are lost; but if God's death lies in the balance, His side goes down and ours goes up like an empty scale”* (LW 41:103).

Just like it wasn't for Himself that Jesus was humiliated but He was showing our true humiliation and bearing it for our salvation, so too it wasn't for Himself that Jesus was exalted but He is showing our true exaltation and accomplishing it for our glorification. It's speaking of us too when it says: **“He was highly exalted”!**

Isn't that wonderful? No matter how low you go, no matter how humiliated you are before God due to your sins, no matter what high hopes get disappointed – you are actually as glorious, high and lifted up, as you can possibly be, in Christ! This is the true basis for high hopes in life.

This is why we look to Jesus' humiliation. It's the key to everything. In this we look away from ourselves, look to ourselves for nothing, and look to Jesus for everything. In His being thoroughly humiliated He was taking away your humiliation and lifting you up high to heaven itself! Forgiven, holy, innocent, blameless, pure as the angels! He makes you as glorious as you can possibly be. His humiliation did this. It highly exalts you. This is what you really are in Him, and what you'll be in glory.

This is where the high hopes for the human race are true. In Christ. This is what gives each person dignity. As a father, I have high hopes for my children. These hopes might not all be realized and sometimes they might not be the right hopes. But this I know: Christ's Passion and Resurrection have highly exalted them to the side of Christ and the throne-room of God. My own flesh and blood that came from my flesh are highly exalted. They are placed above all danger, beyond all fear and worry, safe with my Savior, crowned by Him, objects of His love, rejoiced over by the angels who serve them. But then I have to place myself there, my wife, my mother, my father who already departed this life, all of us who are redeemed by Christ and believe in Him.

None of this is based on accomplishments or failures in this life. Christ has won this for them, for me. My faith must place them there. It's fact, not wish. This is where we must place everyone redeemed by Christ. This is the reason to highly value each human being. This is the reason for high hopes for every person. Christ paid so dearly in redeeming each one, and each one is highly exalted – if only they will realize this! And benefit by believing in Him! What we want for everyone is just to follow Him, sing our Hosannas and follow Him to His cross.

This Holy Week, see in Jesus' humiliation the source of all our good. Let us worship and believe in Him, and love everyone He has redeemed.
“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Amen!