THE NEW SHOFAR

Man is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty. John Calvin

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday – the Triumph of humility

When a conquering hero of the ancient world rode into town in triumph, it was in a regal chariot or on the back of a stately stallion. Legions of soldiers accompanied him in the victory procession. The King of Kings entered the Holy City on the back of t a donkey. His companions accompanied him brandishing not swords, but palm branches. The monument to his victory, erected a week later, was not an arch, but a crucifix.

His earthly beginning was deeply humble. And his earthly end would be no different. The wood of the manger prefigured the wood of the cross. From beginning to end, the details are humiliating. No room in the inn. Born amidst the stench of a stable. Hunted by Herod's henchmen. Growing up in a far-flung province of the Roman Empire--Galilee, the land where the country accent is abrasively thick. His disciples were drawn from the low life of a backwater region. Therein is a message.

Humility Before God

In the spiritual life, there exists a fundamental prerequisite for relating to God, the virtue of **humility**. It is, in fact, a quality from which all other dimensions of life in Christ flow. **Saint Augustine** said, *Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist, there cannot be any other virtue.* Think about that for a moment. Can we receive salvation without humility? **No**. Can we develop in character, love, be reconciled to others, or worship without humility? **No**. This is why humility is such a high value in God's economy.

In **2 Chronicles 7**, the Bible describes prayers and worship offered to God at the dedication of the temple upon its completion. In response, God gives commands for way people can relate to him and the blessings he offers. Contained in this passage is likely the premiere verse for spiritual revival in all of Scripture**.** ***If*** *my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways,* ***then*** *I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

The very first phrase—that is, the very first condition for God's response, forgiveness, and healing of His people, is humility. God says that we are to humble ourselves before Him. We pf is who have strived to live in Christ know that we do not really have a choice when it comes to humility. It is required by God, non-negotiable if we wish to grow into a relationship with the Almighty. In other words, we can be humble, or we can be humbled. In fact, it may be true that one cannot ***be humble before*** God until one has ***been humbled by God***. After some of my own experiences of pain resulting from arrogance and independence, I'd like to choose the former. The trouble is that it is all too easy for us to rationalise our words and our actions so that they are not read as being arrogant at all. In our humility we need to pray daily: I **need** God.

I **need** God's Words of reassurance in the Bible. I **need** the grace of the sacraments. I **need** the Church.

I need to know God as God Almighty, God all Glorious

Humility flows from a perspective that I have about God, and then about myself in relationship to Him. Isaiah's experience in a vision of heaven can help us here: He had a vision of God where He clearly came to grips with the majesty, holiness, righteousness, and purity of the divine character. What was Isaiah's immediate response? *"Then I said, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."* – **Isaiah 6:5.** True humility is only going to become a reality in us only when we understand the nature of the God we come before. As it was with Isaiah's experience, we need to begin by accepting that … *But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people* (**Psalm 22:6**). From there true worship comes. Here is a question: How often do we spend time in acts of worshipping God as is demanded of us in the Bible?

As a result of this vision, Isaiah was "undone" before God, or alternative translation "utterly lost." His perspective was, "I do not measure up. I do not deserve to be in God's presence, let alone to be a recipient of His grace and mercy. I am unworthy." And when we have an accurate understanding of who God is, we will then have an accurate understanding of who we are. The result is humility. The perspective is that there is no way we could stand in God's presence with any sense of a right to do so or pride in what we bring. It is a deep understanding that *He is God, and I am not*.

We owe everything we have, all we are, to God.

Therefore, when we are invited to live in His presence (as we are) and be loved by this holy God (as we are), this fact should produce another component of humility: **gratitude.** Because God is God, and considering who we are, and because we are received by Him, we worship this infinitely other God with hearts full of gratitude and praise! All the time. In all things. All around the throne there were angels, saints, heavenly beings, and a vast multitude of saints around the Heavenly Throne, falling on their faces before the God, and crying out with a loud voice the enduring reality: **We are not worthy, yet we are chosen**.

Here is our human problem. Familiarity breeds ingratitude. What we are used to, we take for granted. Therefore, ongoing spiritual vitality requires constant awakening to what we have in Christ. It means remembering the preciousness of the gift of salvation. Another question: how often do I fall to my knees before God and offer him prayers of thanksgiving?

True humility must be manifested in our day to day living. Upon recognizing God's holiness, and being grateful for His love, the results should be an innate desire to do what He wants, to seek His ways, to trust His commands, and to believe that His way is truly best. True humility requires obedience. In this sense, disobedience to God is not so much rebellion, as much as it is a lack of perspective and gratitude.

Understanding the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem calls forth humility

Moving into the last days before celebrating the mystery of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus we need to pause and remind ourselves that the mystery of Easter demands we reflect on how we understand God.