

Whoever Humbles Oneself Will Be Exalted

GOSPEL READING: Matthew 23:1-12 SUNDAY 1 NOVEMBER 2020

1 Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; 3 so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. 4 They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. 5 They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, 6 and they love the place of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, 7 and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. 8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. 9 And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. 10 Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. 11 He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; 12 whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Meditation: Who doesn't desire the praise and respect of others? We want others to see us at our best with all of our strengths and achievements - rather than at our worst with all of our faults and shortcomings. God sees us as we truly are - sinners and beggars always in need of his mercy, help, and guidance.

Misguided zeal and pride

Jesus warned the scribes and Pharisees, the teachers and rulers of Israel, to teach and serve their people with humility and sincerity rather than with pride and self-seeking privileges and honour. They went to great lengths to draw attention to their religious status and practices. In a way they wanted to be good models of observant Jews. "See how well we observe all the ritual rules and regulations of our religion!" In their misguided zeal for religion they sought recognition and honour for themselves rather than for God. They made the practice of their faith a burden rather than a joy for the people they were supposed to serve.

True respect for God inclines us to humble ourselves and to submit to his wisdom and guidance. We cannot be taught by God unless we first learn to listen to his word and then obey his instruction.

One Father and Teacher

Was Jesus against calling anyone a *rabbi*, the Jewish title for a teacher of God's word (Matthew 23:7-8), or a *father*? The law of Moses in Scripture specifically instructed all fathers to be teachers and instructors for their children to help them understand and obey God's instructions (Deuteronomy 6:7)? Why did Jesus rebuke the scribes and Pharisees, the religious authorities of the Jewish people, in the presence of his disciples? Jesus wanted to warn both his own disciples and the religious leaders about the temptation to seek honours and titles that draw attention to ourselves in place of God and his word. Pride tempts us to put ourselves first above others. The Scriptures give ample warning about the danger of self-seeking pride: *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall* (Proverbs 16:18). *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (James 4:6; Proverbs 3:24).

True humility

Respect for God and for his ways inclines us to humility and to simplicity of heart - the willing readiness to seek the one true good who is God himself. What is the nature of true humility and why should we embrace it as essential for our lives? We can easily mistake humility as something demeaning or harmful to

our sense of well-being and feeling good about ourselves. True humility is not feeling bad about yourself, or having a low opinion of yourself, or thinking of yourself as inferior to all others. True humility frees us from preoccupation with ourselves, whereas a low self-opinion tends to focus our attention on ourselves. Humility is truth in self-understanding and truth in action. Viewing ourselves honestly, with sober judgment, means seeing ourselves the way God sees us (Psalm 139:1-4).

A humble person makes a realistic assessment of oneself without illusion or pretence to be something one is not. A truly humble person regards oneself neither smaller nor larger than one truly is. True humility frees us to be ourselves as God regards us and to avoid falling into despair and pride. A humble person does not want to wear a mask or put on a facade in order to look good to others. Such a person is not swayed by accidentals, such as fame, reputation, success, or failure. Do you know the joy of Christ-like humility and simplicity of heart?

Humility is the queen or foundation of all the other virtues because it enables us to see and judge correctly, the way God sees. Humility helps us to be teachable so we can acquire true knowledge, wisdom, and an honest view of reality. It directs our energy, zeal, and will to give ourselves to something greater than ourselves. Humility frees us to love and serve others willingly and selflessly, for their own sake, rather than for our own. Paul the Apostle gives us the greatest example and model of humility in the person of Jesus Christ, who *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and... who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross* (Philippians 2:7-8). Do you want to be a servant as Jesus loved and served others? The Lord Jesus gives us his heart - the heart of a servant who seeks the good of others and puts their interests first in his care and concern for them.

Daily Quote from the Early Church Fathers: *Whoever humbles himself will be exalted*, by Chrysostom, 347-407 A.D.

"For nothing is as crucial as the practice of modesty. This is why he is continually reminding them of this virtue, both when he brought the children into the midst and now. Even when he was preaching on the mount, beginning the Beatitudes, this is where he began. And in this passage he plucks up pride by the roots, saying, 'Whoever humbles himself will be exalted' (Luke 14:11). See how he draws off the hearer right over to the contrary thing. For not only does he forbid him to set his heart upon the first place but also requires him to follow after the last. For so shall you obtain your desire, he says. So one who pursues his own desire for the first must follow after in the last place: 'Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.'

OPENING PRAYER :- Lord Jesus, you became a servant for my sake to set me free from the tyranny of selfish pride and self-concern. Teach me to be humble as you are humble and to love others generously with selfless service and kindness. **Amen.**

CLOSING PRAYER :- **World Peace**

Almighty God, in whose hands lies the destiny of men and nations, Let not the hopes of men perish, nor the sacrifices of men be in vain. Grant us therefore grace and courage to give and to receive the forgiveness which alone can heal today's wounds. Draw us, O Lord, towards loving kindness and guide us into the way of peace. **Amen.**