

## Like Jesus, we must recognize our need for God

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On this Palm Sunday, in the second reading, St. Paul reminds us of the great humility of our God, that Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross” (Phil 2:7-8).

We are reminded by our God of the importance of humility. Our God lives humility. He constantly seeks out humanity. In the Old Testament, we see a God who is always faithful to his people. Who, even after the fall, gives the promise, who constantly lives in his faithfulness no matter how great the sin of the people of Israel or the sin of humanity. Even though the people of Israel worship false gods, even though they sacrifice their children, even though they constantly disobey him, God pursues his people in love and constantly humbles himself.

We see that most especially in Jesus, he who is true God and true man, who humbled himself in the Incarnation, who humbled himself by taking on a human nature and a human will, who gave himself completely on the cross and is obedient to the Father, and, in that, he is exalted.

Humility is a virtue to which all of us are called. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that “a Christian acknowledges that God is the author of all good” and “humility avoids inordinate ambition or pride, and provides the foundation for turning to God in prayer” (CCC Glossary). Thus, humility is a virtue for which all of us must pray. Jesus himself lived that virtue, and so we must turn to him and ask him for that virtue. And, yes, it goes counter to many things our society idealizes. It goes counter to being completely independent. It goes counter to being totally self-sufficient. It recognizes our personal need for God. But it is only in that recognition of ourselves in need before God that we will be exalted and raised up.

Jesus teaches us in the Gospel of Luke, “Every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 14:11). We see also the great humility of Jesus even in his prayer. In the Gospel of Mark that we have just read and prayed, we observe Jesus in his humanity struggling in the Garden of Gethsemane. We see the heart of Jesus speak to his apostles. He is troubled. He is distressed. He says to them, “My soul is sorrowful, even unto death. Remain here and keep watch” (Mk 14:34). Jesus is totally honest about what he is experiencing in his human heart, in his human nature and in his human will. He is filled with anxiety. He is troubled. He is distressed. But he does not try to solve this on his own, but rather he takes his weakness to the Father. He takes his anxiety, his distress, all of his fears and he brings them to the Father. He is confident that the Father will answer his prayer, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will” (Mk 14:36).

For any of us who have seen the film *The Passion of the Christ*, we can taste the anxiety of Jesus. In that portrayal, we can see how horrible crucifixion truly was, how difficult it was to watch. One can understand the human distress that Jesus experienced. And even on the cross, he is humble. The only word that we have from the Gospel of Mark is the cry of Jesus, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). His cry is not one of despair. His cry is one in which he honestly, in his humanity, is experiencing total abandonment and loneliness. And yet he trusts in God, he trusts in the Father by making that cry and that prayer. In his humanity, he has hope that the Father will be faithful.

And he cries out and gives up his spirit, and in that moment of death, in that moment in which all is completed, in terms of the revelation of his love and his suffering, a statement of faith is made by a Roman centurion who says, "Truly this is the Son of God" (Mk 15:39). The centurion recognizes in Jesus' agony, and in Jesus' honesty before the Father, and in Jesus' trust of the Father, that only he who is true God and true man, hung upon that cross for him and for us. The centurion did not know that, three days later, there would be the resurrection and that death and sin were truly conquered. He placed his faith in Jesus as "the Son of God."

Today the readings call us to pray for the grace of humility, to pray for the grace of humility that Jesus himself lived. So often today we desire to *be* God, in so many different ways. But we are called to empty ourselves. We are called to taste in ourselves the distress of Jesus, to taste the anxiety of Jesus, to taste the loneliness of Jesus, and then to trust in God and to have confidence that, even in the midst of all of this, he is with us.

We have just gone through an experience of anxiety within our city with the flood that faced us. The anxiety was more caused by the loss of material things than anything else. But do we have that same anxiety about the loss of God in our society, or the loss of our lives, or the loss of our souls? Do we confidently turn to God in humility as Jesus did?

As you receive Holy Communion today, I encourage you, as you return to your places, to reflect upon, "Where is there anxiety, where is there fear, where is there distress, where is there loneliness within my own life?" My dearest sisters and brothers confidently bring it to Jesus, knowing that he has experienced it himself, knowing that it is he who is experiencing it within you. Turn to the Father who will give you confidence, who is with you in all of what you are experiencing, who desires to strengthen you and to be with you, if only you turn to him. And then in faith may each of us be like the centurion, when we look upon the crucifix and see Jesus hanging dead, knowing in faith the gift of resurrection promised to us, may we utter in our hearts, "He is truly the Son of God."