

Obedience to God is always an act, to begin on bended knee. C.S Lewis said “that humility is not thinking less of yourself, but rather it is thinking of yourself less. To think less of oneself is to withdraw in isolation, compromising healthy self-esteem. On the contrary, to think of oneself less is to look outward and consider the welfare of others including past and future generations. A slight rearrangement of words, but quite a difference in attitude!

Isaiah today brings a raw and authentic self to God, acknowledging his unclean lips, worried mind, and woeful state. A vision of the Lord, has been shown him. It will lift up this lowly prophet, like how a net full of fish is lifted into the safety of the boat. Truly, it is right and just, all including government, behave humbly before this God. And yet, we so often struggle against accepting that place. Instead preferring pride over modesty, egotism over humility, and self-centeredness over communion! Marveling at our own creation and paying less attention to God’s. From Isaiah’s lowly posture or perhaps because of it, God frees this man of his sin and quickly thereafter commissions him for a specific purpose.

Humility has power to open and drain, from our hearts the poison of sinful arrogance. Decluttering and reorienting us towards God, freeing us from the snares of evil. Once free, we are positioned to respond in ways our heart truly desires. Like Isaiah we too can say to God “Here I am, send me.” Our hands high in the air, like a student who knows the answer to the teacher’s question. Isaiah doesn’t even know where he is being sent; only that it is God, who has cleansed his mind and heart and is now asking of him. The details of the assignment will unfold in due course. But the answer is immediate!

Notice also how St Paul speaks to the Corinthians? He reminds them, Christ has died for our sins. He adds that, Christ appeared to many, upon resurrection, but last of all to Paul. By his own admission, he’s unfit to even be called an Apostle. The last one picked for the team. You can almost see the tears dripping down his face as he makes this profound confession. How difficult it is to acknowledge our smallness, before the immensity of creation? Isn’t this all something to which we are entitled! Thankfully, Paul doesn’t, and neither must we, allow our past to damage our future.

If we did, no one could leave their pew to come and receive the body and blood of Christ. “Lord I am not worthy to receive you” but still we do. And that says more about, how much God loves us than anything.

The ever witty, Winston Churchill was once asked, "Doesn't it thrill you to know that every time you make a speech, the hall is packed to overflowing?" "It is quite flattering," replied Sir Winston. "But whenever I feel that way, I always remember, that if instead of making a political speech, I were being hanged, the crowd would be twice as big." Churchill always seemed to have a way of keeping things in perspective. In a similar way, we too should never be too flattered by other’s compliments or too insulted by their insults. A legislative majority doesn’t give absolute power. Only God retains that privilege.

Remember, the donkey who went into Jerusalem, as the crowd put palms and blankets on the ground before it. It wasn’t proud, nor did its ego swell. Even the donkey knew those accolades weren’t given to honor it, but were rather for Jesus, sitting on its back. When people elect and honor us, we do well to graciously remember it is the Lord, who makes all these things possible."

Today's Gospel however brings us out on the water. When Jesus goes fishing, after a hard day He's after a particular species and wants never to release his catch! Today Our Lord has Simon Peter on the hook, and Peter sounds much like Isaiah. The exception being, unlike Isaiah, who experiences a vision of God, Peter is blessed with a direct encounter in living flesh. Still, there had to be more to this fishing trip, than simply a carpenter giving tips on how and where to cast nets. There of course is, and sisters and brothers, Peter is indeed being primed for leadership, even though he's not quite ready for the keys yet. Played out, already on shore, and getting ready for the next work day, he even throws in a feeble excuse, to escape having to go back out onto the lake. Thankfully though, even if disgruntled, Peter is obedient to Jesus and at that moment passes through the gateway of arrogance and into humility. To a new place where living in right relationship is possible! Peter will become the Church's first supreme bishop and defender of faith! Humility's however, is a portal, some governments have yet to find.

Sisters and Brothers, the time is again now, as it was then, to cast out our nets alongside Jesus and Peter. The fish are still biting, perhaps like never before. In our families, in our parish, in our community and in our schools! We the baptized have agreed like Peter, James and John to go out into that deep, working alongside our brother, bringing souls to Christ.

The deep at this moment, may very well be in our schools. The Church sees education as a process that forms the whole child and seeks to fix his or her eyes on heaven. The specific purpose of a Catholic education is the formation of boys and girls who will become good and not confused citizens of this world, loving God and neighbor and enriching society with the leaven of the gospel. People who will also be citizens of the world to come, fulfilling their destiny to become saints! John Paul II wrote in his 1979 Message to the National Catholic Educational Association, "Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ. Educators, administrators, parents, and bishops guide the school to make choices that promote overcoming individualistic self-promotion, solidarity instead of competition, assisting the weak, instead of marginalization and, responsible participation instead of indifference." Holy Mother Church is ever mindful of ensuring the appropriate involvement of parents in Catholic schools:

Close cooperation with the family is especially important when treating sensitive issues such as religious, moral, orientation toward a profession, or sexual education. It is not a question of convenience, but a partnership based on faith. Friends, the catholicity of our schools depends upon the bonds of communion, between bishops and educators. The bishop must see to it, education in his schools is based on principles of Catholic doctrine and no other.

This is exactly what the bishops of Alberta are presently undertaking and together we must stand shoulder to shoulder with them to protect Catholic education in this province. If new education guidelines were such a great idea, why did an arrogant government not insist, they be applied across all public institutions? Clearly in composing these guidelines they have grossly overlooked the Catholic community yet again, and the Church's many centuries of experience in education.

In a few days Holy Mother Church begins, the great annual retreat, we know as Lent. It is a time set aside to move us into deeper places within the mystery of God. Through acts of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, may we begin in obedience to the Gospel and Church's teaching, treading humbly and together before the God of all majesty.

Amen