

To God Alone Be The Glory

Medicine has come a long way. When I was growing up, pharmaceutical companies were just starting to make medicines taste good. The antibiotics I took for tonsillitis at age five tasted just like orange Tic Tacs do today. But other medicines made you shudder and contort your face and ask: “How can that be good for me when it tastes so bad?” Some chemotherapies have come a long way in the last 20 years, but the older versions of it can still induce people to ask: “How can it be good for me when it makes me feel so bad?”

Every once in a while (or as often as necessary) God gives us a good dose of humility. And our sinful flesh doesn't like it one bit. But the Bible teaches that HUMILITY IS GOOD FOR YOU. In fact our new self appreciates when God puts us in our place.

The dictionary defines humility as: *the state of being humble in spirit; freedom from pride and arrogance.* You probably noticed in your daily Bible reading that most of the Old Testament prophets humbly obeyed whatever God commanded, even when it brought them humility. When Moses' leadership was challenged, he fell flat on the ground before the people. The Lord required Isaiah to go about Jerusalem naked and barefoot as a symbol of what was

coming for the Israelites if they didn't repent of their sins and change their ways. The Lord required Ezekiel to cook his food over a fire of cow feces, again as a symbol of upcoming consequences for the unrepentant Israelites. The prophets understood: HUMILITY IS GOOD FOR YOU.

Then there was David. He had been anointed as the next king of Israel at about age 17, but he had to wait about 13 years for the Lord to take King Saul out of the way. So he waited humbly. Meanwhile God gave David success in battle, and David rose through the ranks to become a top officer. See, HUMILITY IS GOOD FOR YOU.

Even wicked king Ahab, who did more to provoke the Lord to anger than any other king of Israel—even Ahab humbled himself. It took God's prophet telling Ahab that God was going to end his family. But as soon as Ahab humbled himself, the Lord announced a delay in the sentence so Ahab wouldn't have to see it. If God blesses even the humility of those who hate him, how much more will he bless believers who live humbly before him.

And that's the message of our short text. *Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a*

place among great men; it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here," than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman. We Americans don't have a king ruling our country. But the Lord is our King, and he is present everywhere. So don't exalt yourself anywhere. Don't claim to be great. Even if you are doing truly great things, don't get proud about it. Help others do well, and when the time is right, the Lord will see to it you are acknowledged.

Humility prefers to live where there are no lights or cameras. Humility is such a fine virtue that, if it were to catch a glimpse of itself in the mirror, it would be proud at seeing such a fine virtue. So when people point out how humble they are, that's not humility.

Don't confuse humility with weakness. Humility results in strength because it looks to the Lord for help. Humility can even be defiant: "I will not yield to the devil's temptations." The martyrs of old professed Christ to their persecutors with strength: "I will not deny Christ, my Lord. I would rather die." And in humility, they did. And Jesus was pleased to profess their names before his Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32).

It is not humility to yield when someone wants you to disobey God's Word for even a small matter. That's putting your own safety above God's will.

Humility tells God, "Your will be done, Lord. I will do whatever pleases you, even if others make fun of me for it, or hurt me. You are God. I am your servant." **HUMILITY IS GOOD FOR YOU.**

Humility realizes that salvation lies utterly beyond our own efforts, and depends absolutely on the pleasure, will, and work of God alone. If you think you can do something to help God rescue yourself from sin—if you have self-confidence rather than faith in God's free grace, you are not humble before God. And then you should expect the King to humiliate you before others. How much better to ask the Holy Spirit to bring you humility as a gift! He will likely answer your prayer by convincing you how often you sin and how bad your sin is in his sight. But then God can say, "*Come up here. Sit with me on my throne. See how I have exalted you?*"

Some people take humility way too far. Here's what I mean. Although God teaches that we are holy, saved, forgiven, and redeemed by Jesus' life and death, some people are slow to forgive themselves for wrongs they consider especially egregious. "Lord, it doesn't matter what you say about all my sins being forgiven through Jesus' death on the cross. I've done

something so bad that I can never forgive myself.” This may sound like humility, but it’s actually arrogance: “My feelings are more important than what you teach in the Bible.” Better to say, “Lord, I did wrong, and I feel ashamed. But help me feel as forgiven as you say I am because of Jesus. Help me feel just as forgiven when you send consequences my way as loving discipline for what I did wrong. Those consequences will no doubt humble me, but I’m ready, Lord, because you say you’ve forgiven me.”

Then God lift us up. He loves making somebodies out of nobodies. He brings life out of death, honor out of shame, spiritual riches out of spiritual poverty. He delights to deal with the lowly, with the humble. Just look around you here at St. John’s. Do you see many big wigs? Any movie stars, models, or moguls? Any inventors or war heroes? Nope, just a bunch of people unknown outside of Lake City, except by relatives and friends. Yet God said, “I want all of you. I claim you by the blood of my Son. You are somebody special because my love is on you. I see my stamp of approval on your forehead where the water of Holy Baptism was applied to you. Serve me to the best of your ability. I will gladly wash clean all your efforts and count them as holy offerings. I will find a way

to bring you honor—honor that won’t make you arrogant. I’ll help you so you don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought, nor fear to associate with those of low position” (Rom 12:3,16).

God chooses sinners like you and me to speak for him and act like him. He wants people who have been through the grinder, who know what it means to be broken. He wants people who are conscious of their shortcomings, who know how bad sin is in God’s sight, who look to the cross and see that there God rescued us so that we might serve him. Students, do your homework to God’s glory. Adults, clean your home and wash dishes to God’s glory. Employees, work hard for your boss to God’s glory. Drivers, drive your vehicles to God’s glory. **HUMILITY IS GOOD FOR YOU** and for everyone near you. Humility leads to patience with our neighbor, so that we gladly do good to them, bear with their oddities, remain calm, and never find little ways to get even. A humble person has an honest, pure, and sincere heart. Sometimes a humble person cancels a debt rather than trying to get blood out of a turnip. Humility leads to contentment with whatever blessings God has given.

“Lord God, we’re glad to be empty, so that you may fill us. We’re glad to be weak, so that your strength may make us strong! We’re glad to know we are sinners, because you declared us not guilty in Jesus. We’re glad to be foolish, so that you may be our Wisdom!”

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when it’s time to repent. If someone loves you enough to confront you about a sin, be ready to say humbly, “You’re right. I am guilty. It was my fault. I’ll take responsibility by restoring whatever loss I’ve caused.” What a joyful thing for the believer who confronts you to hear! Then they can say, “Christ put away your sin the same way he put away mine. We are right with God by his grace.” If you have humility at that time, you will produce fruits of repentance. It will be clear by your actions that you are sorry.

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when you read God’s Word. In Isaiah (66:2) the Lord says, “*These are the ones I esteem: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my Word.*” You are humble if you make time for contact with your Bible during the week. Humility is never disdainful, apathetic, or bored with God’s Word when it’s time for worship.

Humility knows about the one who redeemed us from sin. Jesus’ birth happened in a cow stall. His early life happened in Nowhere-ville Nazareth. As an adult Jesus had no fixed dwelling place. When traveling, he slept outdoors or found shelter in the homes of friends. He was known for associating with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners—the shunned of society, the lowly and despised. When he needed a boat or a beast to ride, he had to borrow one. When he died and men took an inventory of his belongings, they found nothing, not even the clothes on his body. Now when God takes an inventory of sins we’ve committed, he finds nothing. Our Savior was buried in a borrowed grave. But that was okay—he needed it for only three days.

Jesus’ humility led him to keep the law of God for us. Now we have his record; we can stand before God as ones who kept God’s requirement of humility. Jesus’ humility is very good for us. After his humility Jesus was highly exalted. It won’t be too much longer before he highly exalts us, saying, “Come up here. Come live with me forever.”