



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Trinity 17 2018 St Marylebone 8.30 am

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was invited to dinner in the home of a prominent Pharisee; it was obviously the place to be and, perhaps more importantly, the place be seen!

Regardless of the seating plan, or the indications of the servants, guests jostled for position, trying to get as close to their host as they could.

With his keen eye, Jesus noticed these things, and he told the guests a parable, a parable about the need for humility – better to be invited to sit in a choice seat than be asked to move out of it to make way for someone more important!

And having told the guests a parable, Jesus tells another to his hosts, a story about the need to welcome and make room for those in no position to return hospitality or favour.

In an age and a society where putting oneself forward is deemed a necessity, if not exactly a virtue, what use do Jesus' two parables on humility have for us today?

Of all the virtues and positive characteristics we have come to associate with Jesus, humility is the only one that he explicitly says we should learn from him: “*Learn of me that I am meek and humble of heart.*”ⁱ

What Jesus does not advocate when he invites his hearers to learn humility from him, is to become weak or put-upon, or to dash to pieces one’s self-image or worth.

Jesus told, enough parables about the consequences of hiding one’s talents to know that he does not ask those who follow him to hide their gifts and their abilities, but he does ask that those who follow him remember that their talents are God-given gifts.

Humility is perhaps the most misunderstood and least appreciated of the Christian virtues.

Humility, is not the virtue of the weak, but of the rock solid, of those who come to learn and have a strong sense that if one is alright with God; if one really is God’s chosen and beloved, there is no need to seek the affirmation or the permissioning of a fickle, transient, shallow and fallen world.

The humility of which Jesus speaks, and which he invites his followers to learn from him, is humility characterised by knowing the source and inspiration of one’s endeavours; of not thinking that one is the originator or the ultimate source of one’s talent.

Such humility is the well-spring of positive action, not of stifled inaction; the well-spring which empowers God’s people

to attempt - and to achieve - great things in the name of the One whose servants we are.

‘With God all things are possible’ⁱⁱ, says Jesus: with God, we can launch out into the deepest of waters, put down our nets and be assured of hauling in a great catch. With God, we can walk across the roughest of stormy waters, place our hands into his hands and know that God will not allow us to sink.

The humility Jesus advocates in the gospels and which he asks us to ‘learn’ from him, comes when the knowledge that we are feeble, fickle, fallible, sinful human beings is *matched/balanced/held* in tension with a deep understanding that it is also true that we are gifted, graced, unique and indispensable to the God who calls us into being and who lovingly invites us into ever closer relationship with him. Through discovering that each and every man, woman and child, black, white, Christian, Jew, Muslim, is an unrepeatable gift of Godⁱⁱⁱ.

True humility comes when we truly know that in spite of all our physical warts, psychological quirks and spiritual infidelities, God loves us unconditionally with a love we could never merit or ever be worthy of.

Unlike the guests who jostled for position at the feast, or the host hoping to impress his neighbours, as Christians we don’t have to prove anything to God.

God knows us better than we know ourselves. God loves us, not because of what we are or who we are or where we sit, but because God is.

All we have to *do* is to drop our masks, come down off our self-erected pedestals and allow ourselves, by and through and with God's grace, be just who God has made us to be.

This is the achievement of true humility; the place where we find rest for our souls, and this is how we return true praise and give glory to God.

ⁱ Matthew 11.29

ⁱⁱ Matthew 19.26

ⁱⁱⁱ Fr Rodney Kissinger, SJ, http://www.frksj.org/homily_HUMILITY.htm