

PALM SUNDAY

Year C

28th March 2010

That very unpleasant Dickens character in David Copperfield, Uriah Heep, fawned over his visitors while he described himself, 'We are so very 'umble'. Unfortunately humility has a bad name and that is probably because none of us likes to be humiliated and also because humility is misunderstood. On Palm Sunday, the focus is humility— Jesus' humility and ours. So what is humility?

Humility is not putting down oneself or letting oneself be put down by others, rather it is affirmation brought about by the power of the Spirit of God to enable us to be the light of the world. This cannot be achieved by self-centredness. Humility is allowing oneself to express one's beliefs in a manner which is not controlled by oneself or self-conscious. It is being open to do God's will; and this is what we pray for every day—"Your will be done" The New Testament speaks of this as 'having the mind of Christ'. Christ's humility is described in Phil.2.5-11. Humility involves two simple things: servanthood and obedience to God.

In four short passages the writer of the Second Isaiah captured a picture of the perfect Servant of God. In today's Isaiah 50.4-9a we see the humility of the teacher whose role is to respond to the needs of the learner; the humility of the servant enduring suffering knowing that he is obeying God. The Gospel reading, Luke 22.14-23.56 shows us the complete humility of Jesus—deserted and denied by his friends, mocked and beaten, unjustly accused and tried, sentenced to death and crucified. This was complete submission to the will of God. In literature, in the movies, in life, we might expect opposition, outrage, revenge, but Jesus knew, in the words of Isaiah, "The Lord God helps me", "he who vindicates me is near". His humility and submission to the will of his Father was vindicated and the resurrection is made glorious by the overcoming of evil.

We cannot make ourselves humble by a single act. Others cannot make you humble even though they humiliate you. Humility comes by growing in discipleship, having the mind of Christ, serving others and loving them unconditionally and always listening to hear God's words and responding to his will.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Year C

7th March 2010

'Humanity is 'parched with thirst' (Prayer for the Day) We thirst for meaningful relationships, for meaning in life, for joy, satisfaction, and well-being. We seek happiness. Our society encourages the acquisition of possessions as a goal which leads to happiness. Sometimes people treat others as things to be acquired and then 'dumped' when no longer useful or attractive. A person's worth may be measured by status or possessions or notable achievement. Some seek solace in drugs and alcohol, some in a hedonistic lifestyle of indulgence. Others feel that they are failures because they haven't achieved status or wealth. Yet underneath the veneer of success we can often find disappointment, sadness, guilt, and discontent. We thirst for true life. We long to be truly human.

Food and drink have a large part to play in biblical imagery for they are necessary for life; we all know the comfort of food and drink, the pangs of hunger, the longing for water. Isaiah 55.1-9 pictures the divine banquet waiting for us. It's an invitation to feast on true food, a feast which can only be supplied by God. "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread" may well be said to us today as we are tempted by our consumer society to find happiness in ways which exclude God.

The bread and wine of Holy Communion anticipate our salvation, that time when we will have the satisfaction of living wholly 'in Christ.' When Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians (10.1-13) he was addressing a situation where people thought the sacrament conferred the fullness of salvation on them. We could be in danger of thinking that today too. Rather it is food for the journey into fullness of life., that journey to become fully human, to live lives joined in love in communion with God, sharing in his creativity, acknowledging his grace as Jesus did. The sacrament is a promise of that banquet where our lives will be so totally nourished by God that we become truly the people he created us to be and the whole earth fulfils God's purpose. As Jesus' heart went out to the people of Jerusalem, so God's heart yearns for all people to come under the wings of his love.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Year C

14th March 2010

The English custom of Mothering Sunday began with the Industrial revolution. Workers came home to their families on this day, rejoicing in eating and sharing with their family. Perhaps 'going home for Christmas' is more common in Australia. Whatever the occasion, homecoming should be and is, for most people, a good experience; a time of love and joy, a time of feasting, a time of being with those who love us.

The readings today point us to the joy of homecoming: the joy of the Israelites on entering their promised homeland (Josh.5.2-12) the joy of the prodigal's return home (Luke 15.11-32), and the joy of reconciliation with God, when we truly 'come home' to him. (2 Cor. 5.16-21)

The parable describes the son's discomfort and dissatisfaction with the path he had taken. His desire to return to the comfort of family, motivated by his own need. But the father ran to him while he was still far off, and welcomed him without reservation. He acted out of compassion not self-interest, reconciling the son to himself, offering robe and ring as signs of complete restoration.

God longs to welcome us home. We believe that 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.' He came to us in our alienation and draws us to himself. In his death and resurrection, we can put to death all those things which stop us from being fully human, and in his resurrection we can rise as a 'new creation', into a restored relationship with God, where we belong. This is what reconciliation means. It was God's work in Jesus and it is our work in ministry.

Our calling is to be in a relationship with God, belonging to him, enjoying the love of a compassionate father for his adult child, to be home with him. This is what it means to be truly human. Our identity is found in that relationship, rather than in what we do. Lent is a time of renewing our relationship with God, a time of homecoming, and a time of reflection and rejoicing on what it means to be 'home with God'. See McAuley's hymn No 555 in AHB., 'In faith and hope and love...

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Year C

21st March 2010

From Luke we know Mary to be a contemplative, a little indifferent to the mundane duties of the household and single-minded in her focus on the Kingdom of God and the person of Jesus. We see her in John 12.1-8 so totally absorbed in Jesus that she was herself joining in his suffering and impending arrest, trial and death, anointing him with expensive ointment, wiping his feet with her hair in an act of humility and subjugation.

In Phil. 3.3-14 Paul expounds his theology of the cross, that only sharing in the suffering of Christ in his death can we also come to know the power of the resurrection. We live in the 'not yet' time between Christ's resurrection and his return when we will know resurrection in its fulness.

So how do we share in Christ's death? Those who sow in tears: shall reap with songs of joy (Psalm 126.6) These lines represent the reversal of values the cross reveals: life comes from submission and obedience to God; life comes through giving of oneself, even to death; victory comes through sacrifice; light comes through darkness; power comes through meekness. To share in Christ's resurrection is to share in Christ's life and death. We are called to be sacrificial in our service to other people. In doing so, we will come into that true relationship with God who sacrificed his only Son in love for the world he created. In our sacrifice of ourselves, our power, our greed, our self-importance, our pride, we share in Christ's sacrifice, in his death, and in his victory over death.

Our society does not urge sacrifice: instead, it encourages us to be successful, to accumulate wealth, to buy possessions, to win, to gain status. Those who cry for their ego-ridden selves, their jealousy, their pride and greed will put to death those things which stop us living to the full. Those who seek to serve others and love their neighbour and God with all their heart and mind and soul will share in Christ's self-giving and thus come to share in his resurrection.