

6 March 2013
Lent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Lowly Lamb of God”

Text: Philippians 2:5-11 (Matthew 11:25-30; Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

Ever patient and lowly. That pretty well sums up Jesus, doesn't it? Last week we considered the *patient*, or suffering, part of that pair; tonight, we will take a few moments to think on the *lowly* Lamb of God. Or another way to say that is: the *humble* Lamb of God.

Now, humility is in short supply these days in our world. It used to be that *pride* was seen as one of the cardinal sins - now pride is a virtue and it's opposite, lowliness, or humility, or what has come to be called low self-esteem, is to be avoided at all costs. So don't criticize, don't disapprove, don't do or say anything that might make people think less of themselves or think that they're not good enough. Can't do that. People *need* to feel good about themselves, we are told. But all that has done is create a whole lot of people who pay no attention to the needs of others, or to the will of God. A whole lot of people who believe they are the center of the universe, with the inherent right to be in control, with things just the way they want them to be, and with their opinion as the only one that counts.

And we Christians aren't immune to that. That's all extremely popular and sounds pretty good to the Old Adam that lives within each of us, who likes to be important, who likes to be in control, who likes to be on top, who wants things just as I want them to be, and woe to the person who gets in my way! All that just feeds the monster within. And so even though the Bible lists humility as one of the Christian virtues, along with kindness and meekness (Col 3:12), how often do we think and act the very opposite too? Proud, coddled, spoiled, self-absorbed? Which are all sure signs of an idolatrous heart. Putting ourselves before others; putting ourselves before God.

But . . . *how do you become humble?* It seems actually almost impossible. For the harder you try to be humble, the more proud you become of your accomplishment! So no, humility is not something we can do at all. It is a gift of faith, a gift from God.

Which is what we heard tonight from St. Paul. ***Have this mind among yourselves,*** he says, which we've already pretty well established is not the case with us! But then he goes on to say, ***which is yours in Christ Jesus.*** Which is yours, because all that we should be but are not, all that we need but do not have, is given to those

who love and trust in Jesus. For when you have Jesus by faith, you also have all His gifts. We heard this from Jesus also in the Holy Gospel. **Come to me**, Jesus says, **all who labor and are heavy laden** (all of us laboring hard and striving to lift ourselves up and be someone and make a name for ourselves), **come to me . . . and I will give you rest**. Yes, **take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart . . .**

Gentle and humble in heart. That's what strikes us especially during this Lenten season: Jesus' deep and profound humility. That (to go back to St. Paul): that **though he was in the form of God**, though He was in very nature God, He **did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped**, no climbing up or self-promotion, **but emptied himself**, made Himself nothing. And *how* nothing? **By taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form**. The very Son of God, true God from all eternity, freely and willingly gave up His divine majesty and divine prerogatives to come down from heaven. To be born like us, a true man in every way, to save our "me-first" world. For as true God and true man **he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross**.

And that's significant not just because death on a cross was gruesome and horrible - although it was that! It was actually *much worse* than that, for as we heard from Deuteronomy, **a hanged man is cursed by God**. Jesus in His humility didn't just come and put Himself below us and in our service, He put Himself under the curse and judgment of God for our sins. *He put Himself there so we wouldn't have to be there*. And yes, He put Himself there. It *wasn't* done to Him. Jesus did it. He humbled Himself all the way to the cross **for you**. And in a world all scrambling to get to the top, that's quite a different picture, isn't it?

And if Jesus did that for you, what greater self-esteem could you achieve for yourself than that? What greater height could you climb than to have the very Son of God die for you? You may have all kinds of people serving you in this world and life, but to have the very Son of God serve you? What could be greater than that?

And *what could be more humbling?* That Jesus would do that for you, a sinner. We like having those we consider lower than us and less than us serve us, but when someone greater than you lowers Himself to serve you and considers you worthy of His service, that gets your attention. And makes you realize something out-of-the-ordinary is happening here. **It is a humbling that makes us humble**. For God as creator - check. God as almighty - check. God as lawgiver - check. God as judge - check. But God as humble servant of sinners, of me . . . *that's love*.

And baptized into Christ Jesus, that love has been given to you. For us who have hurt others in our pride, there is the love of His forgiveness. For us who have been

hurt by others in their pride, the lowly, humble Lamb of God is with us, and by His wounds we are healed. And for us who have been exalted with Christ as sons and daughters of God - although we do not see that exaltation yet - *there is rest. Rest for your souls*, as Jesus said. Rest in Christ and His promises. Rest from having to exalt ourselves and climb over others. Rest from having to achieve and make a name for ourselves. For we have been given a name: Christian. We have been given a kingdom. And we have been given the promise of everlasting life. All because of the lowly Lamb of God, who on the cross didst suffer.

And doesn't that sound good? *Rest for your soul!* And when your soul is at rest, when you have peace with God, when your sins no longer torment you, when you are sure of your place in God's family, when you are fed and strengthened by Christ, when you know your future is secure, when you know the things of this world are passing away but that you have an eternal future - when all those things are yours in Christ, yours as His gift to you, *then you also have the gift of humility.* For then you are no longer worried about yourself - you don't have to be! You have everything you need! You can forget about yourself. Now your life is for others, as Christ's was. A life of love, service, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.

Then, in the end, the *visible* exaltation will come. What is true now, though hidden, will then be visible for all to see. That our Saviour who so humbled Himself for us, ***God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*** And we, though humble now, will be exalted with Him in His glory. And still not thinking of ourselves! But only of being with Him who came to be with us and save us - the Lamb of God, pure and holy.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.