

GROWING Together

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FOLLOWING THE CRUCIFIED CARPENTER

Humility is a peculiar property: the moment you recognize that you have it, you lose it. (Like the Christian who was awarded a medal for his humility, and then the community had to take it back because he was wearing it all the time).

Initially, 'humility' in Judeo-Christian texts referred to lowly status socially – to the poor or the afflicted who might suffer from temporary calamities, military oppression, or even an act of God. To be humble was to be powerless and vulnerable, but confidence in God could lead to a confession of faith: "Yaweh is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18)

Later, the word 'humility' shifted in meaning; it was now seen as a character trait, as an expression of dependence on God rather than on political power or wealth. The ethical Zechariah, writing of the ideal political state, says that even the king himself will be "humble and riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). The humble person recognizes that "we do not live by bread alone" (economics) but also by God's word (faith). To be humble politically is seen in the way in which the state cares for the sacred triad of widows, orphans, and aliens/refugees. Proper governance, then, of institutions – whether they be religious or political – is to recognize that to be humble, power is restricted and intimidation by status or rank runs counter to the good of the community.

Humility in the early church was exemplified by Paul, who refused payment for his services (2 Corinthians 11:7-9), and by Peter, who saw it as the hallmark of a successful community, the basis of community ethics (1 Peter 3:8, 5:5). And it was the humble who in the Virgin's song were the special concern of God (Luke 2:52, 53).

Humility, a lack of concern for one's own prestige or privileged position, is the opposite of societal patterns of power expressed in privilege, titles, concessions, and rank.

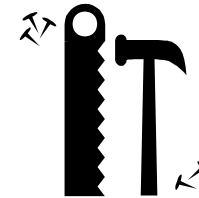
And humility is embedded powerfully in the great hymn found in Philippians: Christ "took the form of a slave" and "humbled himself even to the point of death—even death on the cross" (Philippians 2:7, 8).

Humility, then, is not a casual construct of wishful thinking, not a denial of personal self worth, but it is the pattern of life for those who take seriously the crucified carpenter.

Several implications follow.

1. How does humility affect my dealings with peers and neighbours, friends and family?
2. What difference will there be in the way I make decisions and carry out my responsibilities in the market place? (i.e. how to express power correctly)
3. Does humility affect how we 'do' church at the parish level – our structures, governance models, and decision-making processes?
4. How does humility affect our relation to Christian bodies other than our 'own'? What do we talk about, and from which perspectives? Are we 'right' and they 'wrong' in the values they hold and in their expression of those values?

Prayer: We acknowledge you as Parent, Guide, and Guardian. May we live the humility of the people of God in our everyday life, acknowledging our dependence on you, and refusing the options of arrogance, pride and violence in following Jesus. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



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