

Palm Sunday—March 24, 2024 (Confirmation)
Text: Philippians 2:5-11
Theme: Humbly Following Jesus

Humility is an important attribute for a Christian. In fact, I would say that a large percentage of our difficulties in this life are caused by our pride which is what attacks humility. Pride is tricky for us because it does not always look prideful. You have heard of false modesty whereby we draw more praise for ourselves by feigning modesty. Pride can be similar because the question is always, “are you taking pride in yourself or are you taking pride in what God is doing through you?” If you are taking pride in yourself, that is false pride, and essentially, it is just another form of idolatry in which we place our confidence in something to do with ourselves instead of in God. For instance, when I was in college, if you had asked me if I believed in God, I would have said yes without pause. Of course I believed in God. I was in the pre-seminary program for heaven’s sake! But, on Sunday mornings, my idolatry showed itself. I didn’t really believe that my faith needed to be fed EVERY week. I had great pride in my intellect, my theological acumen, and my ability to communicate. That would all see me through. I didn’t really need to get out of bed on Sunday morning when I hadn’t gone to bed until Sunday morning. I didn’t really need go to church and hear a pastor drone on about things I already knew. I thought my faith would be fine. After all, I was in the pre-seminary program!

Thankfully God intervened and spared me as He often does spare drunks and fools. He is a gracious God and He led me, through my mentor, to understand that my pride in my abilities would eventually lead to the death of my faith, and then, no amazing abilities would be able to save me. Once faith is dead, you cannot feed it. That's what St. Paul is talking about in the Epistle for today.

Jesus is God. He did not have to undergo the torture and damnation that awaited him when He rode into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. He could have just left the earth and forgotten the whole thing. But he didn't. Because of His love for us, He was willing to put His own needs and wants second to what we needed from Him. That is the mark of humility; when you put what God wants above everything else, especially yourself. Want to be mean to that person who was mean to you? Want to buy that special doodad instead of giving an offering to the Church? Want to ignore what some authority in your life told you to do because you think you know better? All of that, and much more, is pride. Pride comes before the fall because pride causes us to fall every time.

Humility is a much more joyful way to live. Scott Golz is a retired Navy Chief if you didn't know. He was telling me stories from his Navy days and he told me once that being a Petty Officer second class is the best place to be in the Navy. For the Petty Officer second

class, everything is either going up the chain of command to the Petty Officer first class or down the chain to the Petty Officer third class, but nothing ever stops on your desk. In a sense, that is the definition of humility. Everything is either going up to God or down to Satan but none of it is really our business. What are we called to do? Feed our faith with Word and Sacrament to keep it strong, proclaim the love of Jesus to anyone who will listen and wait for our Lord to return. That's it. We're not called to solve the problems of the world. We can't fix the wars in foreign lands. We can't even fix the poverty in our own city. All we can do is do what we can to love people and be the hands and the feet of Jesus wherever and whenever the Lord has need of us.

Today we confirm two of our youth into the Christian faith: Hank Pavlovski and Lorelai May. Hank and Lorelai have both been taught the faith since they were little children by their parents and grandparents. They have now completed the Christian educational program for confirmation here at Trinity. They are ready to take their vows before this congregation where they will promise to suffer all, even death before they will fall away from their faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ. I pray for them that the Lord will use them in amazing ways. I pray that they will have great success and joy in their lives. I pray that they will enjoy a long life and good health.

But, above all, I pray for their humility because if they remain humble, always looking to the Lord for strength and direction, always placing their wants and needs second to what God demands, their faith will become stronger than ever and they will be powerful witnesses to the world.

We confirm on Palm Sunday because the symbolism is so rich. On the day Jesus entered Jerusalem where He would be completely humiliated: tried, crucified, damned, and buried, on this day, we send Hank and Lorelai into their Jerusalem. We don't know what the Lord has in store for them but we do know that if they remain constantly faithful to Him, they will be filled with joy and peace whatever may come. There will be good times and there will be difficult times, but they are washed in the waters of Holy Baptism, taught by the Word of God, and fed with His holy body and blood and we know they will be fine because Jesus is with them always. They are the next generation of witnesses that we send into the world to proclaim the name of Jesus and I have very high expectations of them because already, their faith is powerful.