

Imitate Christ

- ✦ in humble attitude (vv.5-8)
- ✦ accepting God's praise (vv.9-11)

In the Name of Jesus, our Savior and King, dear fellow celebrants:

A hospice nurse whose services were in great demand, was asked to care for a patient, but first she needed some information. “Is your friend a Christian?” she asked the prospective client. “Yes, in the highest sense, a man who lives in the fear of God. Why do you ask?” “Sir, I was the nurse who attended Voltaire in his last illness. For all the wealth of Europe, I never want to see another infidel die.”¹

Voltaire (1694-1778) was the Hawking-Dawkins-squawkins of 18th Century Europe. Like Hawking and Dawkins, the bragging evolutionist of our day, Voltaire once boasted: “In twenty years Christianity will be no more. My single hand will destroy the edifice it took twelve apostles to rear.” He died. A few years later Voltaire's printing press was churning out copies of the New Testament, including these awesome words: “*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.*” You can say to every atheist who insists he does not believe in God: “You will. Yes, you will.”

But if that's as far as we get with this text, we have become nothing more than a new generation of hypocrites. The entire text, including the opening verses were written to teach us to **Imitate Christ**.

✦ in humble attitude (vv.5-8)

What is the most elusive of Christian virtues? Martin Luther said it “is so fragile and sensitive that it's not capable of looking at itself. Only God can look at it as we read in Psalm 113:5-7.”² “*Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap....*” Humility is so elusive! As soon as you think you have it, you've lost it. You might as well try to get a grip on Jell-O.

But since “*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*” (James 4:6), we need to “*humble [ourselves] under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*” It's the only way you can learn to “*cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*” (1 Peter 5:6f NIV84)

That's one of many things that make these verses priceless. Jesus gives us a perfect example of humility that we can look at. But the more we focus on Jesus, the more His strength surges into our souls for living lives of Christian humility and love. When we so much need our Lord to empty us of ourselves, He can turn our trials into moments of ultimate refreshment as He fills us up with Christ. The better we come to know Christ, the more fully and completely His unselfish love permeates our attitudes and actions. We have here a great encouragement and magnificent motivation **in humble attitude** like Christ.

When we look at Jesus, we're looking at God from all eternity. His divine names, divine characteristics and divine works go all the way back before creation. “*All things were made through him and without nothing was made that has been made.*” (John 1:3) He did not need to grab deity to get it nor grasp it for fear of losing it. He could confidently wash His disciples feet without being diminished at all in His divinity. But right there you see how God's Son was hiding His glory. He literally emptied Himself of the full use of His power for a life of service on earth.

¹ Rein, R.C. *Treasury of Themes and Illustrations*. Milwaukee, WI: NPH, 1983, ref. 298.

² Luther, Martin. Quoted in *By Faith Alone*. Copyright © 1998 by World Publishing Inc. www.Laridian.com.

If you took X-rays or MRIs of Jesus' body, it would have the same schematics as ours. But one thing was missing that the best medical technology cannot sense: original sin. Jesus did not inherit this birth defect from His parents as we did from ours. Mother Mary and stepfather Joseph never had to teach Jesus to be good; He could not do anything wrong. Ever have someone say that would be a terrible person to know? But Jesus was not self-righteous; He was just righteous. Hurting people were His opportunity to open the wells of compassion from God. No matter how tired He was, noisy children, outcast woman, 5,000 families in the out back – Christ's humble compassion gave glimpses of deity.

But no one, especially not His disciples, could have guessed where all this would go. Even though Jesus clearly told them, no one understood or wanted to believe it. How could the Passover crowds from Galilee, joining the folks from Jerusalem to welcome Jesus, how could so many of them turn from praises to "Crucify!" in just a matter of days? Why would Jesus take His disciples through such a gut-wrenching experience like that first Holy Week?

You already know if you've prayed for a humble, thankful heart. You know God must first go to work as the great Surgeon of our Souls. He has to cut deep in order to heal us. He has to empty us of our self before He can fill us with His own grace and goodness. If we truly want to **Imitate Christ** and be loving husband, respectful wife, obedient children, loyal Christian friends, then God must work a miracle **in humble attitude**. Don't look inside yourself for that. Whatever you had will vanish. Follow Jesus to the Passover meal this Maundy Thursday and receive His body and blood in the Holy Supper. Continue into the Three-Day Service (*Triduum*) to be there when they crucified your Lord on Good Friday. Don't skip a single act of this Passion Play of our salvation. Christ wants to live in you for this miracle too:

✠ accepting God's praise (vv.9-11)

It's no mystery why the self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders, insisted on execution for the Man from Nazareth. Even Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, knew they were driven by envy. After seeing so many signs and wonders in Jesus' miracles, they still refused to believe in Him. Finally, ***"they loved praise from men more than praise from God."*** (John 12:43 NIV84)

If I as a pastor value people praise more than **God's praise**, I cannot tell you what you *need* to hear, only what you *want* to hear. Then there is no way to please my Lord and Master Jesus Christ. My death could be no better than Voltaire or any God-denying philosopher of this age, maybe worse. If you prefer people praise to **God's praise**, you'll stay silent when sin is approved and promoted among your friends, relatives, associates and neighbors. But come the Judgment Day, when that last trumpet sounds, people-praise-lovers will have nothing to help them face the terror of the Almighty.

For Christ Jesus in His ultimate humility earned top spot in God's glory. ***"He became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 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."***

Personally, I hear these glorious words and I don't want to wait. I want to praise Jesus now as the King who made a gift of my guilt. If you were playing a game with a friend and stepped out of bounds, he might say, "I'll give you that one." Because of Jesus' suffering as our Substitute, God took the whole stinking mass of our sin and said, "Look at Jesus. I'll give you this one."

"What, this whole life?"

"Yes, and better still the next life, eternal life with me in heaven." **Accepting God's praise** as forgiven sinners now means hearing even more generous praise from God on Judgment Day. To all who were baptized into His Name and continue in that faith trusting in Jesus, He will say, ***"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*** (Matthew 25:34) Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Amen.