44A Homily for the Twenty-Sixth Sunday of the Ordinary Time Year A

Today in the second reading St Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we find one of the greatest Christological hymns in the New Testament. Based on that hymn I like to reflect with you today the virtue of humility in the life of Christ and also to examine this virtue in our own lives. In Dostoevsky’s novel “The Brothers Karamazov” we find an old woman coming to make her confession to monk called Fr. Zossima. In return Fr Zossima advises the old woman by telling a parable of a disillusioned doctor who one moment had great dreams of universal love, love with which he would dream to embrace whole humanity with compassion and mercy and on the other hand next moment had bitter disappointments in dealing with humans in reality. So this doctor says with a sincere tone “I love humanity, but the more I love humanity in general, the less I love people in particular.” While his dreams portray visions of saving humankind in his daily life as a medical practitioner but in reality the good doctor can’t stand the people around him. The slightest complain of a patient rattles his nerves. Often he hates at the way someone talks. He sneers at the way someone walks and he could barely tolerate the manner of someone’s dress or bearing. Finally this doctor says these words which sum up everything: “In twenty-four hours I begin to hate the best of men. … I become hostile to people the moment they come close to me.”

Christian humility at its finest has love as its root. Humility emanates from love. Negative humility focuses on self and one's inadequacies. True Christian humility is motivated by love and a focus on others. Paul’s Christological hymn in his Letter to the Philippians is a greatest reminder of the humility driven and sustained by love. “…Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped.” He did not seize or claspe his rightful dignity and privilege. Rather he emptied himself. It is not just emptying, emptying what? The Greek word “kenosis” bears a more profound meaning. It is self-emptying of one’s own will, one’s own likes, one’s own comfort, one’s own ego, one’s own glory and status, one’s own plans, one’s won desires and so that one is totally open and receptive to do what God wants him or her to do. This is Christian humility. This Christological hymn by St. Paul tells us what Jesus had to do after emptying himself through the mystery of incarnation because one empties oneself so that one is ready, open and receptive in order to do what God wants him to do. In the life of Jesus what was the will of the Abba Father when he emptied himself, the acceptance of death, not mere death but a humiliating shameful death on a cross. But in doing so Jesus gains everything. As the hymn says: “Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those 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.”

The problem of the cynical doctor of Dostoevsky’s novel had was he wanted to embrace the humanity with love but he was ready to empty himself of his heavy luggage of status, self, ego, glory and comfort. He wanted love but not its cost. That cost of love is humility, humility achieved through self-emptying. There is no humility if it is not driven, prompted and fired by self-empting love.

Let us pray:

Merciful Jesus, Touch our souls with your self-emptying, self-effacing love so that we may stand before our brothers and sisters with our hearts bent in humility and service.