

I Stand Here Humbled

Preached by the Right Reverend Grant Lynn Ford at the Sunshine Cathedral on Reformation Sunday, October 28, 2007.

THE WRITTEN WORD

Sunday, October 28, 2007 – In celebration of Renewers of Faith

The Light of the Ages

Ecclesiasticus 35:12-17a

¹²Don't even try to bribe God! Not even a dishonest sacrifice will work. The *Holy One*, an impartial judge, ¹³has no favorites, and doesn't ignore the poor in favor of the rich. The *Eternal* hears the plea of those who are wronged, ¹⁴and heeds the cry of the orphan and the widow. ¹⁵(O, the tears that run down the widow's cheeks as she accuses the man who caused them!)

¹⁶The acceptable prayer comes from the one who does what the *Infinite* requires. Those prayers will reach the clouds and ¹⁷beyond.

The Light from a Teacher of Truth

"Recessional" – Rudyard Kipling

The tumult and the shouting dies, / The captains and the kings depart;
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice, / An humble and a contrite heart:
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet, / Lest we forget, lest we forget.

The Light of the Master Teacher

Luke 18:9-14

⁹To some who were so pleased with their own goodness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this story: ¹⁰"Two entered the temple to pray, a leader of the religious right and a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee postured before God, praising himself: 'Thank you, O God, that I'm not a robber or a crook, and I don't cheat on my spouse. And am I ever grateful that I'm not like that tax collector over there! ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth my income.'"

¹³"The tax collector, on the other hand, stood way off to one side. His face was buried in his hands rather than uplifted to heaven, as he cried, 'God, have mercy on me, an unworthy person.'"

¹⁴"The truth is, the tax collector went home justified before God, but not the other. For if you exalt yourself, life will humble you. But if you humble yourself, God will exalt you."

THE PROCLAIMED WORD

Recently in Italy I saw a bishop, a priest, and a peasant in one of the great cathedrals. I watched as the bishop approached the altar rail, beat on his chest and declared, "I am nothing! I am nothing!" Then the priest approached the altar rail, beat on his chest and declared, "I am nothing! I am nothing!"

I was amazed by this display of humility when the humble peasant was moved to imitate the bishop and the priest, so he approached the altar rail, beat on his chest and declared, "I am nothing! I am nothing!"

That's when I heard the priest turned furiously and hissed into the bishop's ear, "Who in the world does he think he is?"

Well, maybe it didn't quite happen like that. But it could have if I'd been there at the right time. Maybe...

But it does remind us of the Jesus story today, with some slight differences. In this story the religious leader "postured before God, shouting out: 'Look at me! I'm no crook. I don't cheat on my spouse.'" And I'm sure if he was alive today, he would have added: "I'm such a good Christian!"

Reminds me of a fascinating website called www.bettybowers.com, where Betty's guidance, as the site says, is "probably the only thing standing between her readers and the sulfurous pits of an everlasting Hell." As she says, "Betty Bowers is a better Christian than you are." Pride is not a pretty thing! Even when we take pride in being super-spiritual!

Now I'm not talking about being proud of your church. I've served this church for more than 21 years now, and I'm rightfully proud of all we have accomplished.

I'm proud of all of you who have given of your time, talent and treasure to make it happen.

Now at the end of that 21 years, I'm proud to be part of the transition we are going through. This next Saturday we will install a new Canon Pastor. We searched for over five years to find the right candidate, and I believe we selected the absolutely best person in the Reverend Durrell Watkins. He will take this church to places that I could never have done.

And I'm proud of all of you who have reached out to Durrell and Robert, to welcome them not only into this church, but into your hearts. It's not always easy to change pastors, but we believed that we could create a new model for transition of responsibilities, and I believe its working.

And you have continued to love Todd, Ed, Marian, all those in the Canon Circle, as well as other leaders in the Cathedral and our Foundation. I'm pleased with our new Pastoral Intern. I want you to know that I lit candles for all of you in many churches all over Italy. I lit those candles and I prayed for you.

Right now I admit to feeling a bit like Moses who was standing on the mountain addressing the Israelites as he was about to hand over leadership to Joshua. But unlike Moses, who was then going to go up the mountain and dig his grave, I'm planning on going into the Promised Land with all of you. Too many wonderful things are about to happen, and I'm not going to miss out on all the fun.

Next week you'll hear Durrell give us his vision for our future, and I'm excited as Dean of the Cathedral to support that vision and to work with him to make it a reality. In a year or two people will be amazed by our outreach into South Florida and the Caribbean.

I'm proud that the Canon Circle is becoming a real Senior Ministry Team, working together to provide leadership and pastoral care.

I'm proud that the Cathedral Chapter is coming into its own, and that our various Boards of Directors are taking their responsibilities seriously, with both commitment and concern.

I'm proud that we are finally beginning to really understand and practice extravagant hospitality: welcoming our guests as we would welcome them in our own homes. Another old-fashioned name for this is evangelism: sharing good news with good people and especially with people not always thought to be so good.

Our Gospel reading this morning reminds us that good news is for the rich and the poor, the high-brow and the low-brow!

With all this talk about being proud, I never forget that all this was accomplished not by you and me, but by God working *in, through* and *as* you and me. I love what the Apostle Paul says: "Work out your own wholeness with reverence and awe...for it is God who is energizing in you the power and the will—the want-to and the how-to—to accomplish all this Good." *Philippians 2:12-13*

That's where the religious leader went wrong, when he took such great pride in his personal spirituality while looking down his nose at the lowly tax collector, a man despised as a Roman collaborator in Jesus' time.

We must never look down on those that Jesus identified with: the poor, the broken, the needy, those called 'the lowly and outcast'. We must never think ourselves better than others.

During the American Revolution an officer in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers busy repairing a small redoubt. Their commander was shouting instructions, but was making no attempt to help them. Asked why, he replied with great dignity, "Sir, I am a Corporal!"

The stranger apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers himself.

When the job was completed he turned to the corporal and said "Mr. Corporal, next time you have a job like this, and not enough men to do it, go to your commander in chief, and I will come and help you again."

Too late, the corporal realized that the man speaking to him was General Washington.

We can get all caught up in a fine new Cathedral, now under construction. We can get carried away with our own grandeur and even the size of our church. Or we can be humbled by recognizing the blessings that have been poured out on us.

And with humble gratitude we can always remember past blessings— Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet, lest we forget, lest we forget—while reaching out to our future, becoming the very persons and the very church God made us to be.

Humility is not the opposite of pride; it is the modifier of pride. Having pride in ourselves, in our service, in our generosity, is a good thing...when modified by the humble recognition that it is God working in and through us all.

With that kind of pride, and that kind of humility, we can all stretch and grow and fulfill God's dream for each of us and for all of us as the Sunshine Cathedral. And that's the truth!

THE FINAL WORD

Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Religion is to do right. It is to love, it is to serve, it is to think, it is to be humble." Sounds good to me!