

HE EMPTIED HIMSELF

“Though he was in the form of God, Christ Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped, something to be exploited; he emptied himself.”

“Though he was God, he did not think equality with God as something to cling to; he emptied himself.”

“Christ Jesus had equal status with God but did not think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantage of that status; he emptied himself.”

It is the final week of Lent. The week we call Holy. The focus is all on Jesus—who he is, what he will do and what will be done to him. We also pray about and meditate on what all of this means in our lives today.

Saint Paul, in his letter to the Christians at Philippi, wrote the words I quoted at the beginning of this homily. Christ Jesus is God. He shares in the glory of the Trinity. But when the Word became flesh, became a human being, so that He could live the same life we live and even die the same death we die, the Son of God emptied himself. He emptied himself out for a reason. There was a purpose behind what he did. This morning we will meditate on this emptying out.

And God the Father, when He chose to create, the Father emptied himself out too. Completely. There is no clinging in God. No clutching anything tightly for self. No using divine glory just to serve divine purposes. God is love.

What do we call this mutual emptying out of Father and Son? What do we call their love for each other? The Holy Spirit. The Spirit clings to nothing. And yet, The Spirit has all. There is nothing lacking in the Spirit.

Humanly speaking we do not care for the concept of emptying ourselves out. That empty feeling. Running on empty. All my accounts have been emptied out. The word empty often carries a negative connotation. But it is not so in God. When God’s Word became flesh and emptied himself out, it was for us. It was an affirmation that the Father’s creation was good. Is good. Still. Despite sin. We humans are good. Not on our own. But despite our selfishness and sin God’s grace makes us good. And pure. God’s love poured out in the Incarnation is the condition for the possibility of goodness and purity in our livers. In other words, God’s emptying Himself out for us—is a gift.

An implication of this simple truth. In the passion account, look at how Jesus endured and acted in all that happened to him. He gave of himself in various ways. He gave of himself. Gift. He is gift. How do people give of themselves? Look at the Passion account for Mass today. Jesus encourages Simon Peter. There is even kindness for Judas who betrays him. Jesus heals the ear of the man who came out to capture him. He gives. He empties himself. He is gift.

Even when Peter denies him three times, which Jesus had predicted, Jesus simply turns and looks at him. Peter weeps for his own cowardice. Jesus hears Peter and yet empties himself of his rancor and resentment of Peter. He empties himself out for Peter too. He still believes in Peter even though Peter is struggling to believe in Peter. And the women who believed in Jesus have gathered and they are following and weeping—for him. That is their emptying of themselves. Their gift. Look at Simon of Cyrene who is forced to help Jesus carry the cross. He does. He empties himself. He gives his gift even though reluctantly.

Look at the good thief who offers consolation as he hangs in his own death agony. He empties himself out. That is his gift. He who has lived a life of taking and stealing, at the end, gives the gift of consolation to a dying Jesus and receives eternal life as a reward. Jesus looks out at those who have falsely accused him and those who have crucified him and says: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” His whole life is gift. His whole life is emptying himself out. Ours too. Ours too. We just don’t always recognize it. Sometimes we don’t own it because it is forced on us like Simon of Cyrene.

Sometimes our gift comes in a moment of desperation like the good thief. It doesn’t seem to be enough but, with Christ, it is. Nothing is lost. Nothing is useless. Everything matters. Love conquers all. My friends. Do not be afraid to empty yourselves out—not for another, for your family, for friends or neighbors, for your country, for another whom you do not know.

Let me conclude with this entry from a Spiritual Journal.

“I am the Lord your God. I am caring for you. What is little known about my Incarnation is the gift aspect. I am leading you in this so that you can accept the gift in its totality. It was within my power to bestow a gift—the gift is in me. All gifts have their origin in me because I am free and only I am able to give freely without demand for repayment. Any capacity you have in this is from me—as a gift. As it is in your power to give life and your life is a gift, know first that I am the original gift because I am the Life.”

May He bless us today and give us his peace.