

Clothe Us With Humility

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[0 : 00] We need light. And you have given us light through your word and in your Son. May that light touch all our hearts and minds.

This night we ask in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. It would be helpful, I'm sure, to me if you would turn in the Bible to page 218 of the New Testament section and turn there to 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 5.

1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 5. And to this phrase which comes in that verse, and which actually I'm going to read from the New International Version.

All of you clothe yourselves with humility towards one another. All right. Now, in this year of our Lord, 1990, and having been the rector of the parish for 12 years, and being very anxious to say something to you that will dramatically change the whole course of your life, a modest ambition which I don't let go of, I want to say that one of the things that troubles me most in this parish is the relationships between people here.

The relationship between women and women in the parish, between men and men, between youth and adults, the relationship between new members and old members, the relationship between people who live in Shaughnessy and people who don't live in Shaughnessy, and all those things happen.

[2 : 07] And with them comes a terrible outbreak of things. Things like pride and arrogance and covetousness and resentment and intellectual superiority and social preferment and jealousy and anger.

And that tears the congregation to pieces. Not in an impolite way, of course. It does it quietly and respectably. But it happens.

And you find, as you get a little closer, that this person simply can't get along with that person, and they don't know why that person would ever be in church in the first place.

And it's the man who earns \$100,000 may appear to the man who earns \$10,000 to be very arrogant.

The man who earns \$10,000 may appear to the man who earns \$100,000 to be full of resentment and bitterness.

[3 : 17] And you see, what this verse says to both those men is, all of you clothe yourself with humility towards one another.

You see, the great thing that we have, almost an absolutely unlimited capacity for, is humility. If you haven't at the moment got very much, let me tell you that there is room in your life for a great deal of it.

And it's something that you could have in almost unlimited quantities. If you were to look in the bulletin that you have in your hand tonight, you'll see that I made what makes me blush when I read it now.

But at the moment, I felt very convicted about it. But I said, there may be 10% unemployment in our country, but our God has given us full employment.

Now, the reason I said that was because I think it's true. But it may not be very acceptable if you're out of a job. And so I want you to try and understand.

[4 : 29] I went on to say, on behalf of God, that he uses even recessions to accomplish his purpose. And that our true wealth is absolutely secure as we travel in search of him who was born to be king.

You see, because recession or no recession, we are not born to be the slaves of an economic system. We are born to be the children of God.

And we are the inheritors of a great kingdom. And that kingdom is the kingdom that becomes ours as Jesus Christ lays claim to us and as we acknowledge his claim on us.

So that the simple thing that I want to say to you tonight is that this God of all the universe, the God who created us, came in great humility at Christmas.

He humbled himself and came among us. Very difficult for us to understand because we are so oriented in the other direction.

[5 : 51] We are so oriented in terms of achievement, in terms of honors, in terms of dignities, in terms of power, in terms of wealth, in terms of all those things. Those are the things that make life meaningful to us.

And those are the things that we are after. But our God humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross.

And the picture, which is almost too much for people like us to even consider, is that which is central to our faith as Christians, that the God of all the universe was born of a virgin in a stable in Bethlehem.

That as man, among men, as a teacher, renowned and respected, as a miracle worker, as one who had a message which transformed those who heard it, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, and in great humility hung naked upon a cross.

That's what it means to humble yourself. And so, for us as a congregation, that we are not meant to stride around in the pride of our achievement, in the accumulation of wealth, in the ability of our intellect, in our social performance, and all those things that make us, in terms of the world, important and dignified and honored people.

[7 : 43] No. It's our great challenge to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. And it says this, you see, in a very particular way.

It says, all of you are to clothe yourself with humility one towards another. So that when people encounter you, they see humility.

They don't see your arrogance. They don't see your self-sufficiency. They don't see all your attainment. When they come up against you, they see that you are clothed in humility.

And why are you clothed in humility? Because that's what God has called you to. He makes it very clear. One little illustration, which I've used once before, I know.

But I used to be a minister at a church in Toronto. And it's the oldest church in the city of Toronto, a church building. And on one side of the church, there is a huge marble memorial slab to one of the patriarchs of the Goodrum family, who were famous for whiskey known as Goodrum and Wurtz.

[9 : 08] And Mr. Goodrum was memorialized in the marble plaque on that side of the church, which said, so-and-so Goodrum, leading citizen, leader in the community for 35 years, a rector's warden in this parish, a great man.

And on the other side was an equally large and magnificent marble plaque in memory of Mrs. Goodrum, of whom it said she was a humble believer in Jesus Christ.

And I think she'd need to be. And... But no less do we need to be in our relationship to one another. There may be all sorts of reasons why your life may be filled with pride and arrogance and achievement. But there is far greater reason that you should be clothed in humility in relationship one to another.

And that's what God commands us to do. Let me read you the passage in which he says it so that you will be familiar with it and let me leave it with you.

[10 : 38] He says, Humble yourself, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that in due time he may exalt you. You see what an enormous amount of energy it saves you.

You don't have to exalt yourself at all. He will do it in his own time and in his own way. You don't have to make it the business of your life to do it. In due time, he will exalt you.

Your business is to humble yourself before you. He says, Now, Peter says, this is going to cause you some anxiety because it's not the pattern that is acceptable in the society in which we live.

But Peter says, Approach it with glorious abandon. And he says, Cast all your cares and anxieties on him for he cares for you.

You don't have to care for yourself and your name and your prestige and your achievements and your goal and your power building. You don't have to do that.

[11 : 58] You can unload it all. Cast all your cares on him. Your anxieties on him because he cares for you. He suggests that you be sober and you be watchful.

And the reason he says to be sober and to be watchful is because he says you have an enemy. And the enemy is your adversary, the devil, who prowls about seeking to devour you. That is, in the jungle the lion roars tonight. You see, what happens is that when we come up against each other and are repelled by each other because of our arrogance and because of our sense of importance, when we are repelled by that, as a community we are scattered. And when we are scattered, then we are vulnerable to our adversary, the devil, who like a lion seeks to devour us.

And so my prayer for this parish at this Christmas is this. mind you, when I say this to you, I want just to tell you one other thing about it, and that is this, that there is an option.

[13 : 37] The command of God to you and to me as members one of another is to clothe yourselves with humility towards one another.

In other words, that's to be the goal of your life, to discover the profound reasons why before God and before one another you should be clothed with humility and not with pride.

And that's what we're to make our goal. And when I say there's something else about that, and that is that one of the ways that God helps us to be humble is by humiliating us.

that's his machinery for helping us with this process. But we should be eager that that process should be accomplished in our lives and that we should be humbled before God, that we should be clothed with humility one towards another, and that at this Christmas time when you have the amazing story of the eternal God being humbled and becoming a child, a story which is inseparable from the man Christ Jesus who humbled himself to death on a cross, us, then you'll understand.

You'll understand how important it is. You won't find a lot of competition in this thing if you want to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God.

[15 : 27] But that's what God calls us to do. And my prayer for us as a parish, for those who profess and call themselves Christians, for those to whom is committed the inheritance of the kingdom, to those who are to be the messengers of the gospel, that God would give us great grace and a heart's desire to obey this command, to humble ourselves under his mighty hand.

casting all our cares on him because he cares for us, and that we may not be scattered and devoured by our adversary, the devil.

God grant that we may know this as a parish, and that the rehearsal of the story of Christmas might show us that this is indeed the great path of wisdom and understanding and the path to which God calls us in our relationship to him and in our relationship to one another.

Amen. Amen.