

*“True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.”*

– C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

The reading today is about an incident that happened immediately after the last supper. Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body given for you, do this in remembrance of me.” Then, in the same way, he took the cup, saying “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” Jesus was of course talking about his death and the work of redemption. Immediately after this, the disciples began to argue among themselves as to who was the greatest disciple. It was on the eve of his death and you can imagine that Jesus had a heavy heart. In fact we are told in the Bible that Jesus cried when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Hebrews 5:7). To the naive argument of his disciples, Jesus replied, “The greatest among you should be like the youngest.”

This, of course, was not their first time. In Luke Chapter 9 just after Jesus prophesied about his death, the argument about which was the greatest erupted. Jesus said, “For whoever is least among you all is the greatest.” Then on another occasion Jesus said, “For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (The word “exalted” means “being praised highly.”)

You can perhaps be forgiven for thinking that the Bible is rather difficult to understand because Jesus used a lot of paradoxes in his sayings. A paradox is a statement containing two contrasting ideas that seem impossible. One example is “more haste, less speed” which means “if you try to do things too quickly, it will take you longer in the end”. Jesus seems to have the habit of using paradoxes in his sayings and we can find many examples in the Bible such as:

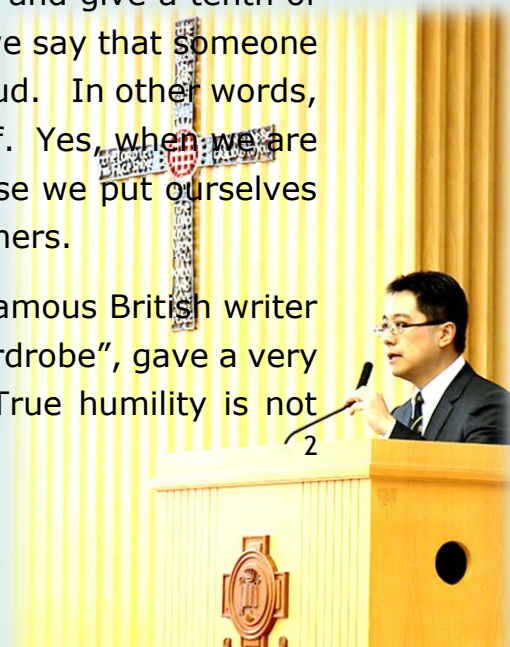


- “Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.” (Luke 17:33)
- “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)
- “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5)
- For whoever is least among you all is the greatest.” In a world in which the greatness of a country is measured by its wealth and its military strength and the greatness of a person is measured by their material possessions and status, what Jesus said about greatness seems rather illogical and hard to understand. In Jesus’ saying, greatness has nothing to do with strength, but with humility and service.

What then is humility? In an increasingly individualistic society that puts much emphasis on our rights, on self-promotion and self-glory, humility seems a very foreign concept.

The opposite of humility is pride. The well-known story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is a very good illustration of pride. Jesus spoke of two men coming up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a much despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood up by himself and prayed loudly and said, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” (Luke 18:10-14) In English, when we say that someone is “full of himself”, we mean that he is very proud. In other words, he is so conceited that he thinks only of himself. Yes, when we are full of ourselves, nothing else can fill us because we put ourselves right in the centre and we have no room for others.

Humility is just the opposite. C.S. Lewis, the famous British writer who wrote the “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe”, gave a very precise definition of humility when he said, “True humility is not



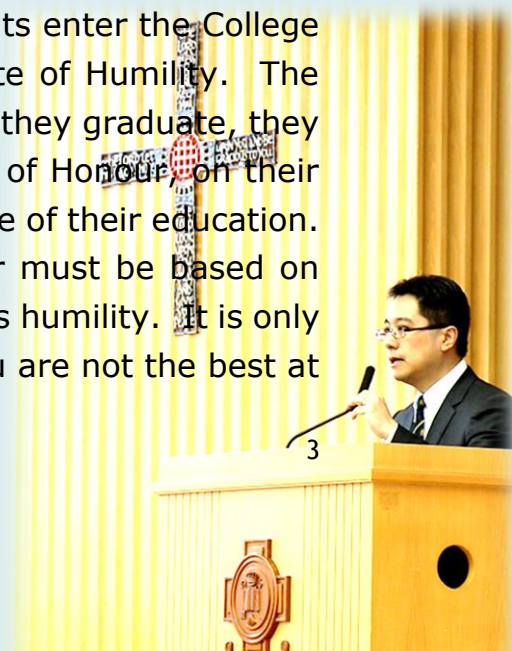
thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” In other words, humility is not the same as timidity or thinking poorly of yourself. It means that we think of other people as more important than ourselves. If pride leads us to focus on ourselves, then humility leads us back to God. The classic example of humility of course is Jesus, the Son of God, washing the feet of his disciples. Jesus emptied himself in order to serve.

In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Our pride makes it all about “me”, less about others and even less about God. Yet, Jesus asked us to do just the reverse, to focus on our God first and then others just as we love ourselves.

Do you remember I talked about the art of appreciation two weeks ago in our assembly? It is only when we can think of ourselves less that we learn to appreciate the goodness in others. Only then can we understand why Jesus said, “The greatest among you should be like the youngest.” And that is also the reason why the meek shall inherit the Kingdom of God.

Humility is not just a basic virtue. It is also the basis of learning. Our Academic-in-Residence this year, Dr. Allan, came from Gonville and Caius College of the University of Cambridge. Within the College, there are three famous gates. Students enter the College through the first gate, which is called the Gate of Humility. The second gate is called the gate of Virtue. When they graduate, they have to walk through the third gate, the Gate of Honour, on their way to Senate House. This marks the final stage of their education. It is a good reminder to students that honour must be based on virtue and that the beginning of all knowledge is humility. It is only when you are humble enough to know that you are not the best at



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everything that you will begin to accept advice. Only an empty cup can be filled.

Mr. Dennis Yuen

Acting Principal

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