

**Pastoral Reflection, April 2024: Following the Humility of Christ:** We emphasize Christ's humility during Holy Week in his final journey to the Cross. But divine humility pervades His entire incarnation. This is evident on Palm Sunday; for following on the heels of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time. The entry is victorious: children throw down their garments before him and wave palm branches. He receives the praise: "*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" (Mk 11.9 and Jn 12.13;). But the pomp and majesty that normally accompanies a royal entry is replaced with humility and meekness. "*O you who ride on the cherubim and are praised by the seraphim, you have sat, O gracious Lord, like David on a foal, and the children honored you with praise fitting for God.*" The humility and meekness that mark Christ's entry into Jerusalem thus continue the paradoxical and wondrous expression of the compassion that informs his Incarnation as the suffering servant: the one willing to suffer with and for us (com-passio): "*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*" (Is 55.4) Moreover, Christ's humility in his incarnation is expressed in his fundamental solidarity with us and willingness to serve us for our sake – Christ as the Good Samaritan..

Humility involves a radical and honest acceptance of ourselves before God and before our fellow humans and creation. We are, first of all, to be humble before God. This involves an honest and ongoing repentance over our sinfulness – and how that has estranged us from God – as well as profound thanks for the blessings that God has given us, especially through Christ's Incarnation, to restore us to the fullness of life. However, our humility also involves a fundamental acceptance of the vulnerability and weakness that belongs to us as created being: without God, we are simply nothing. This is, after all, what Adam and Eve could not accept in the Garden of Eden when they decided to disobey God.

Humility, thus, is a "*gateway to dispassion*" (Peter of Damascus). Through dispassion we are rid of the impulses, desires, thoughts, and images of things and our fellow humans that lead us to sin – everything in us that separates us from God and breaks apart our relations with others and with ourselves. Dispassion in particular requires the elimination of those passions and fears by which we denigrate and condemn others. Humility leading to dispassion helps us attain to a perfect love of God which leads us to love and care for our fellow humans as did Christ, the Good Samaritan.

Something for you to ponder during Great Lent as you journey with Christ in his journey to Jerusalem: *God himself is humble because he is love. God humbled himself out of love. Therefore, not only does humility open us to God: it clothes us with Christ, the humbled God. Humility is the ornament of the godhead. The Word clothed himself in it when he became man. By it he lived among us in the flesh . . . And anyone who wraps himself in it truly makes himself like him who came down from on high and clothed his grandeur and glory in humility.* (St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Ascetic Treatises*).

(Fr John D. Jones, Priest-in-Charge, Holy Theophany Church – A Mission of the OCA)