

The Form of a Servant
Palm Sunday
(From the Epistle: Philippians 2:5-11)

LET this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ Jesus... took upon him the form of a servant.

Let's dissect this extraordinary phrase.

First, let's admit that there are many *forms* one might wish to take upon oneself, long before one would choose that of a *servant*. In our homes, for instance, many of us take on the forms of kings and queens. Unlike Jesus, who stated, *I am among you as he that serveth* (Lk. 22:27b), we seek to be served. Of the many roles we are called to play --whether, father, or mother, or sister, or brother, or friend, or fellow-citizen, or employer, or employee-- that of the *servant* simply doesn't figure in.

In democratic America, we even disdain the concept: "We are all equal. There are no *servants* here. No lords, no ladies, no gentry, no superiors and inferiors. No one should put on airs!"

The role of a servant (or at least, let's say, of a *good* servant), is, after all, if we would but focus on it for a few uncomfortable moments, wretchedly difficult. Servants "have no life". They are at the beck and call of others. They are not allowed the luxury of choosing which commands they will obey, or which they will thwart. They are summoned, and they are dismissed. They may not even be thanked. They may be called nothing other than, "Hey...*you*, c'mere at once!" Servants may be obliged to endure unkindness, ingratitude, even abuse and cruelty, without so much as a spoken protest. They may well remain unacknowledged and anonymous. They would surely thrive under praise and appreciation, but they can never expect it nor demand it, and so they must try to learn to accept it with the same detachment and disassociation with which they attempt to regard mistreatment.

For the modern and enlightened American who well knows his rights, such a place of imposed misery is grossly unfair. If it were ever expected of him, he might respond with a howl of protest and a host of reasons why he would never permit himself to be subject to such conditions.

But Jesus shames us all. If any one individual might claim exemption from such a status, it would surely be He. His standing and status as Son of God, King of Kings, Lord and Lord, the Incarnate Word, Co-Creator with the Father, and a host of other titles, should never, ever have

included even the least possibility or hint of occupying a place of such inferiority. There are none, after all, who are higher than He. And *who is it* that He is called to serve? The wealthy, the famous, the glorious? No..., it is *us*, sinners, rebels, enemies of God, before whom He stands in this remarkable capacity.

Is this not the very *last* form we would expect Him to arrive in? It came as such a monumental surprise in His day that it made Him virtually unrecognizable. If you were told that a great monarch had just arrived, and you ran down with the adoring crowds to greet him, would you be looking for one who

...hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not (Isaiah 53:2b,3).

But let's consider something else for a few moments: the matchless privilege, dignity, and effectiveness of servanthood. Now we can begin to understand why the Son of God *took upon him the form of a servant*. Think of the distinct advantages of a position of abject humility, invisibility, and unimportance, in a world filled with pride, ambition, arrogance, and haughtiness. Such a nonentity --a nobody, a zero, a nonperson, no-name, nothing, small fry, mediocrity, no-hoper, loser-- can move about almost unnoticed. There is a whole host of things such a person can accomplish as he functions well below the world's proverbial "radar". Like a guerrilla warrior, hiding behind the camouflage of servanthood, he can do just about anything and go just about anywhere. And so it was with our Lord. Within His chosen disguise His invasion of the world was absolutely successful! It was only for the briefest of moments --to the smallest of audiences and the humblest of souls-- that His true glory became visible. And had the world possessed *eyes that see* (Mt. 13:13), they would have beheld His greatest exaltation at His very lowest moment: dying upon the Cross for the sins of the whole world.

Servants can only be promoted, because there is no lower position to occupy. Having no dignity, there is no task that can fall beneath them. Since we can expect anything from them, their range of duties is unrestricted. Since everybody loves to be served, they will never be unemployed.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus... The world today is in great, great need of Christian servants. Its feet, like those of the disciples, are soiled with dust, grime, and filth. It is the product of the sin and wickedness which fills the earth. Through humble acts of love, and the proclamation of a forgiving God, we can stoop to serve them, and set them free.

But in our entering into that place of our Lord's lowliness, be sure that we will also some day share in His *exaltation*.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.