

The Festival of Palm Sunday
The Sunday of the Passion
17 April 2011
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

“God Humbled Himself unto the Death of the Cross for the Sins of All Men to Save them from their Sins.”

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Philippians 2:8

Introduction

Here we see the true nature of God. Humility. St. Paul writes that God humbled Himself. If anyone had reason to brag and not to humble Himself, it certainly would be the Lord of Glory. But, St. Paul says, He, the Lord of Glory, humbled Himself. He who has the least reason to humble Himself and the most reason to exercise His glory, humbled Himself unto the death of a cross.¹

Why did God do this? God humbled Himself in order to save men from their sins. We already know this Man is the Lord of Glory; so He wouldn't suffer death on the Cross for Himself. So, it must be for us. God became man and in and through the human nature did not glorify Himself, but humbled Himself in order to die on the Cross for the sins of all men. And through His death on the Cross for all men, He saves them from their sins.

¹“Also in his sermons Luther urged this point again and again, as, for example, in his discourses on John's Gospel, where he says: ‘Because St. Paul and Holy Scripture declare that the Son of God, the King of Glory, was crucified, we, too, should so speak and believe without any hesitation. Whoever really believes the Book of Holy Scripture will not object to such expressions’ Quenstedt ... writes: ‘it is the very assertion and teaching of Scripture that God, namely, God's Son has suffered and died.’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951, pp. 138, 139. Dr. Pieper was President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod from 1899-1911.

And in God's humility unto the death of the Cross to save men from their sins, we see His glory: Mercy.

I. God humbles Himself in order to Die for the Sins of All Men.

A. Because the Lord of Glory becomes man, He can die.

In the first place, how can God die? After all, He is immortal. To be sure, God in and of Himself cannot die. But now that God has become man in Jesus Christ, He can and did die for the sins of the world. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they know *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.²

How can one crucify the Lord of Glory? Well, one can't crucify the Lord of Glory in and of Himself as He is, namely, the immortal, omnipotent God. But when God becomes man, then He can be crucified, dead, and buried.³ St. Peter, for example, tells us it is God who died on the Cross when he writes:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.⁴

The Lutheran Church confesses:

²**I Corinthians 2:7-8.** Likewise, St. Peter writes: "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." **Acts 3:14-15.**

³"Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried" **The Apostles' Creed**, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 12.

⁴**Acts 20:28.**

*We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance, and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale. By this I mean: If it were not to be said [if these things were not true], God has died for us, but only a man, we would be lost. But if “God’s death” and “God died” lie in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. But indeed He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be said: “God died,” “God’s passion,” “God’s blood,” “God’s death.” For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.*⁵

Because the Lord of Glory has become man, He can die a human death.

B. The Lord of Glory dies for the sins of men.

And clearly, because Jesus is the Lord of Glory, He didn’t die a human death for Himself – for the Lord of Glory has no need of a human death – but rather, He died a human death for the sins of all men. For death comes about only because of sin. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.⁶

And because the Lord of Glory had no sin⁷, He assumed the sins of all men and died the death they should have. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures....⁸

⁵*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*⁴⁴, underscore added.

⁶**Romans 6:23.**

⁷“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin.” **Hebrews 4:15.**

⁸**I Corinthians 15:3.**

Again, St. Paul writes:

For he has made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.⁹

Remarkable: Even though Christ possessed Almighty Divine Power and Majesty according to His human nature, nevertheless, He humbled Himself, i.e. He did not use the Divine Power communicated to His human nature¹⁰, in order to expire and die the death for us¹¹ on the Cross that we deserved. St. Paul writes that the Man Jesus, existed in the form of God:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery¹² to be equal with God....¹³

⁹**II Corinthians 5:21.**

¹⁰“**THE SAVIOR IN THE STATE OF HUMILIATION 134. Wherein did Christ’s State of Humiliation consist?** Christ’s state of humiliation consisted in this, that according to His *human* nature, Christ did *not always* and *not fully* use the divine attributes *communicated* to His human nature. 334 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. *Phil. 2:5-8.*” *The Small Catechism*, p. 109.

¹¹“**CHRIST’S WORK OF REDEMPTION, OR ATONEMENT 140. For what purpose did Christ so humble Himself?** Christ so humbled Himself *to redeem me*, a lost and condemned creature.” *The Small Catechism*, p. 112.

¹²“The context proves that not the act of robbery, but the object of robbery is meant. Christ thought it not robbery ‘to be equal with God.’ ... Indeed, the only possible meaning is: Christ did not parade His equality with God, He did not make a show of it. So John Olearius: ‘Christ did not display His deformity [‘form of God’, v. 6] like spoils’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 290, amplification added. Dr. Pieper was President of the Missouri Synod from 1899-1911.

¹³**Philippians 2:6.** “Phil. 2:6 ff cannot possibly mean anything else than that Christ, in humbling Himself according to His human nature, refrained from the full use of His imparted divine majesty, so far as His office as the Servant of God and man demanded this.” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pp. 288, 289.

And St. Paul says He emptied Himself:

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.¹⁴

Christ, the Lord of Glory, then humbled Himself and let Himself expire in order to atone for the sins of the world. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod from 1899-1911, writes:

How could the Almighty die? Scripture tells us that the Son of God simply did not use the power which was at His disposal. John 10:18: ‘No man taketh it [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.’ That explains His poverty, His limited knowledge, indeed the whole state of exinanition¹⁵. Christ’s arrest was due solely to His non-use of the power at His command. He permitted the band of soldiers to bind Him, though but a moment before, by His omnipotent word, He had cast that same band to the ground (cf. John 18: 12, 6).¹⁶

Therefore, Christ relinquished the use of the Divine Majesty and Power communicated to His human nature by the Personal Union, i.e. the Son of God taking into His Person the human nature by the Incarnation, in order to lay down His life for us.

II. The Lord of Glory Conquers Death for All Men.

A. Through His suffering and death, the Lord of Glory conquers death for all men.

We, then, see that the Lord of Glory did not press His infinite Majesty and Glory into the destruction of men, which we all thoroughly deserve because of our many sins, but, out of His Great Mercy, pressed His infinite Majesty and Glory into the service of men and their

¹⁴**Philippians 2:8.**

¹⁵“**exinanition** ... an emptying or evacuation; hence, privation; loss; destitution.” *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, p. 642, s.v. “**exinanition**”.

¹⁶*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 285.

salvation.¹⁷ For who is it that lies in the tomb? It is the Almighty God. While death is powerful, it is not powerful enough to hold the Almighty God and so the bands of death were burst by the Lord of Glory. St. Peter writes that death could not hold Him:

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.¹⁸

Christ's resurrection from the dead means Christ had successfully atoned for our sins. For no mortal man can atone for sins because it would take him forever – and then some. After all, we have offended the infinite and eternal God. One offense against God, then, is infinite and eternal because the One Whom we've offended is infinite and goes on forever. It would take us an eternity and then some to pay off that debt – never mind all the other subsequent sins that would take another eternity to pay off for each one. Yet Christ, because while True Man is also the True and Almighty God, can pay off such a debt. In his classic work, *Why God became Man*¹⁹, Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1093-1109), wrote:

The diversity of natures and the unity of person Christ was powerful for this: that if the human nature could not do what had to be done to restore men, the divine would do it; and if that was not befitting for the divine nature, the human nature would provide it. It was not one and another who were doing, but He Himself. Existing perfectly in both natures, He would pay through the human nature²⁰ what was owed and would be able to do by the divine nature what was fitting The debt was so great that though no one but man had to pay it, yet no one but God could pay it, so that the same one who is God would be man. For that reason, it was necessary for God to assume man into the unity of His person, since He who

¹⁷“[The Christian] believes, on the testimony of Scripture, that the Lord of Glory was crucified (I Cor. 2:8) and that this gives to the suffering an death of Christ its value (Romans 5:10; 1 John 1:7).” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 58.

¹⁸**Acts 2:23-24.**

¹⁹*Cur Deus Homo* (*Cur* [Why] *Deus* [God] *Homo* [Man] [became]).

²⁰“... the Scripture truth ... the Son of God became Man to destroy the works of the devil in and through the human nature” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 274.

had to pay the debt and was unable to do so would be in the person who could. ... No one could make satisfaction except God; no one had the debt except man. If he is only man, he will not do it because he will not be able to pay. If He is only God, He will not do it because the debt is not His Therefore God became man in order that He who was able to pay might owe the debt and that he who had the debt might be able to pay it.²¹

God, therefore, attached the infinite weight of His Deity in His Death and, thereby, crushed and vanquished death.²² The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Christ could not dispense with His deity in the state of exinanition. He had to attach the full weight of His deity to His obedience, suffering, and death, as Scripture tells us Gal. 4:4-5 and Rom. 5:10. Facing death, He had to be the

²¹Quoted in the Rev. Dr. John Gerhard's, *Theological Commonplaces ... On the Person and Office of Christ*, tr. Richard J. Dinda, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 40.

“Anselm of Canterbury. Eminent English prelate, called the father of medieval Scholasticism; b. at Aosta, Piedmont,1033, d. at Canterbury, England,1100. Son of wealthy parents, well educated, became monk "in 1000, succeeding Lanfranc of Bee in Normandy as prior in 1003 and advancing to the post of abbot in 1078; became archbishop of Canterbury, England, after the death of Lanfranc, although he was prevented from taking over the office till 1093. Had many difficulties with the king of England over rights and privileges, a compromise being effected in 1107. In character he was humble, kind of heart, and charitable in judgment; had marked success as teacher, and the common people loved him; his most celebrated writing *Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)*.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 25, s.v. **“Anselm of Canterbury”**.

²²“Lutherans say that the blood of Christ, the blood of the Son of God, has infinite value in even its smallest amount – not the quantity, but the quality of the blood shed by the Son of God endows it with infinite redemptive worth – but that, on the other hand, since Christ poured out His blood according to the will and counsel of God, we may not say that He shed one drop of His blood superfluously. [Footnote 90: “Joh. Heermann’s hymn ... : Thy blood, the precious cure, So potent is and sure, One drop can bring salvation To every soul and nation. Yea, from Hell’s mouth and quiver Can rescue and deliver.] God regulated this matter. Quenstedt: ‘God alone knows best how much is required for a plenary and perfect satisfaction, and why He wanted His only-begotten Son to suffer just so many strokes, no more, no less, and to shed just so much of His blood as was shed Just how much it behooved the divine justice to accept, the Word of God, not our imagination, must tell us.’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pp. 381, 382.

mighty God that He might be able by His death to overcome death, to raise up again the temple of His body (John 2:19, 21), to take up His life again (John 10:18). Jesus Christ “died not simply as any other man, but in and with His death conquered sin, death, hell and eternal damnation” (*Trigl.* 1023, F. C., Sol. Decl. VIII, 25).²³

B. In the death of the Lord of Glory, we see Heart of God toward fallen, sinful men: Mercy.

And in the death of the Lord of Glory on the Cross for the sins of all men, we see clearly the nature and heart of God toward fallen, sinful men: *Mercy*. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

The climax of Christ’s emptying Himself was reached when “He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.” Luther: Above and beyond being found in fashion as a man and comporting Himself as a man, He became lower than all men ... by submitting to a death which was the most ignominious, namely, the death on the Cross; He died as an archknave above all knaves So, then, He was made entirely nothing. All this He did not do because we were worthy of it, but He did it because He was obedient to the Father”....

Luther’s words from the same sermon, in which he shows that the humiliation of Christ took place in obedience to God’s will and thus reveals God’s heart toward mankind, fittingly close our discussion of Phil 2:5ff.: “Here Paul with one word opens heaven to us and permits us to gaze into the unfathomable abyss of the Divine Majesty and behold the ineffably gracious will and love of the fatherly heart toward us, that we may feel that it pleased God from eternity what Christ, that glorious Person, should do, and now has done, for us. Whose heart will not melt for joy? Who can refrain from loving, praising, and giving thanks and from becoming on his part, too, not only a servant of all the world, but gladly becoming meaner and lowlier than anything, when he sees that God Himself regarded him so dearly and so richly pours out and exhibits His fatherly will in His Son’s obedience?”²⁴

²³*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 289.

²⁴*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pp. 291, 292, underscore added.

III. Men are Incorporated into this Blessed Death of Christ and Mercy of God through the Gospel.

But where do we find this Great Mercy of God today? We have already found it in the hearing of the Gospel.²⁵ St. Paul the Apostle writes of the Holy Baptism, i.e. the Gospel²⁶, and its exhibiting and giving to us the mercy and kindness of God in Christ-Crucified for our sins and, thereby, giving us life eternal:

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.²⁷

²⁵“So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” **Romans 10:17.** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” **Ephesians 2:8-10.**

²⁶The Word and the Sacraments are the Gospel: “But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.* 80, 81, *Triglotta*, p. 411.

“But just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike our hearts, so the rite itself strikes the eye, in order to move the heart. The effect of the Word and of the rite is the same, as it has been well said by Augustine that a Sacrament is a *visible word*, because the rite is received by the eyes, and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore the effect of both is the same.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII (VII): Of the Number and Use of the Sacraments.* 5, *Triglotta*, p. 309.

²⁷**Titus 3:4-7.**

Conclusion

Remarkable: The Lord of Glory presses His infinite Majesty and Glory not into the destruction of fallen man, which we richly deserve, but into man's salvation.

And the Lord of Glory did so by emptying Himself, humbling Himself, relinquishing the use of the Glory His human nature possessed by virtue of the Incarnation, unto the death of a Cross for our sins and the sins of the entire world.

And therein we see the nature of God and His Glory: *Mercy*. Through this indescribable Mercy, God redeems fallen men and gives them saving faith, the life everlasting, and the resurrection of the body glorified like Christ's risen body to dwell forever in the Kingdom of Glory of the Lord of Glory.

Amen.