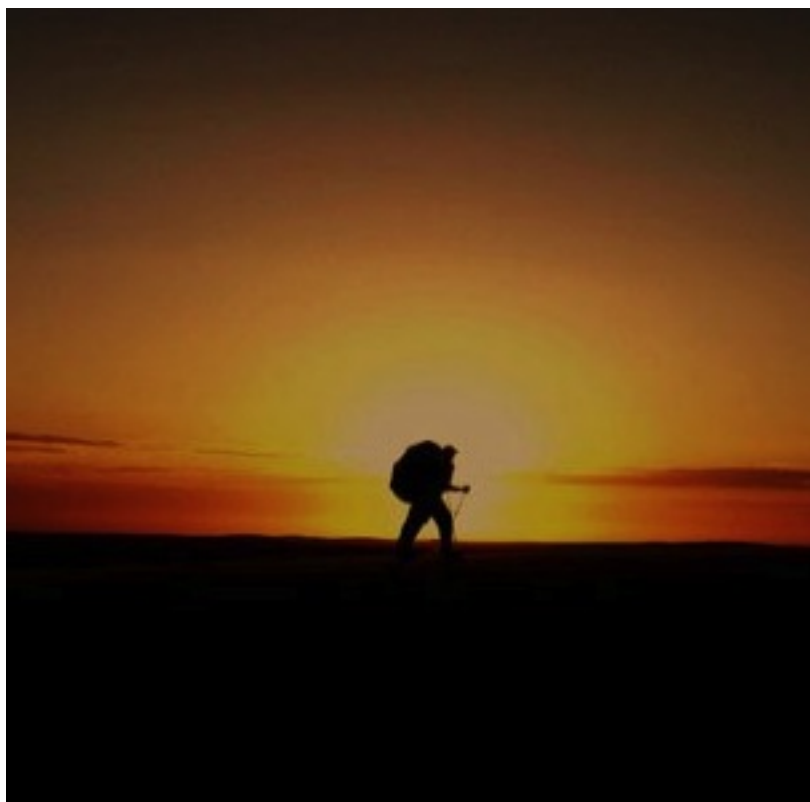


## Commentary to the Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Empty Means Full ' Today's second reading is from the second chapter of Paul's Letter to the Philippians. The reading contains one of the most beautiful Christological hymns in scripture. Paul begins by telling the Philippians to care for each other, be united in one heart and do nothing out of selfishness and vainglory.

He then tells us to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus. The Christological hymn follows: "who though he was in the form of God did not deem equality with God something to be grasped, but rather emptied himself....etc." For God to work through us, we have to take on the humility of Christ and be more concerned with those for whom we are called to care than with ourselves.

As a priest, I have had times when I've been treated rather poorly and have come close to saying, "This I don't need. Let them figure out how to handle this without me." There are times that I want to pack up and go home.

But then I have to ask myself, "Why are you here in the first place?" I often have to remind myself that I am a priest, and the people need a priest. When I realize that, I am far more open to letting God work through me.

Then I end up experiencing a great comfort and success in ministry in various ways because I realize that I have to be concerned with Christ, not with myself.

I am sure you have had similar situations. I am sure that every married person has had to be more concerned with caring for his or her spouse than with how he or she has been treated by that same spouse. One snaps at the other, and the other has various choices: retaliate and snap back, employ the old classic passive aggressive behavior known as the silent treatment, sulk, or say, "I'm sorry," and look for something to do together to ease the upset.

Certainly, the silliest words ever uttered by Hollywood were from the old movie, Love Story, "Love means never having to say you are sorry." No, love means always having to say you are sorry.

But that takes humility. Pride and marriage cannot co-exist, at least not peacefully. But through humility you can be like Jesus for each other. I am sure that every parent has had to swallow hard when their children have said something thoughtless.

Parents know that they have to be more concerned with caring for the children than their own feelings. Parents do not bring children into the world so they can have little people telling them how wonderful they are. They have children to expand their love and to fill the world with new reflections of God's love.

And yes it is an important part of parenting to bring children up to respect authority, but for their sake, not for the parents' sake. I am also sure that every single person has been confronted with the choice of serving God or receiving the proper respect he or she feels due.

We can't serve God when we are so concerned about how we are treated by others. Why? Why do we have to be more concerned with others than with, as the athletes would say, "Receiving our props." (By that they mean, our proper respect.) That is the way that God works through us. When we are concerned with ourselves, or proper respect, vain-glory the reading calls it, then we make ourselves the center of our action instead of the work of God.

When we empty ourselves of our desire for status, position, respect, what have you, then we are like Christ, who humbled himself. For the Christian, empty means full. We empty ourselves of our self concern and find ourselves full of Christ. We often come upon the scripture passages where the Lord tells us to pick up our crosses and follow Him.

We know that this means accepting our suffering so the world can be filled with sacrificial love, and the Kingdom of God might grow. But we usually just relegate these passages to the way that we handle crises. Today's second reading is more expansive. It tells us that to follow Christ we have to change our attitude in life to be like His.

We have to be like the One who humbled Himself. This is difficult. It is difficult because pride is so deeply rooted in each of us. But through the Grace of God we can conquer pride. And then we can be the people that God needs us to be for His Kingdom. Christ is the victor, even over our pride. And because He can conquer our pride, "He makes us an eternal offering to the Father."

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ