

Imitating Christ's Humility



Christopher News Notes

“He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble His way.”—Psalm 25:9

IN AN AGE WHEN THE LOUDEST, flashiest people get the spotlight, humility might be seen as an old-fashioned concept or a fool's errand. But that's the kind of worldly idea that Christianity turns on its head. Remember, Jesus, the Son of God, humbled Himself many times—from the Incarnation to His death on the cross—to connect with us, the human beings He dearly loves.

Writing for the website *Aleteia*, Brother Silas Henderson, SDS, explored the definition of humility, noting that it “is one of those words we often hear in church, but which has become something of a dirty word in our contemporary culture... The word ‘humble’ comes from the Latin word ‘humus,’ meaning ‘earth.’ So to be humble means to recognize and accept what it is that we’re made of—a mix of gifts and skills, weaknesses and faults. With this comes the reality that we’re made of the same ‘stuff’ as every other person on the planet. None of us is better than anyone else. We’re all gifted and beautiful, faulted and broken in our own ways. And each of us is loved by the God who created and sustains us.”

In looking at Christ’s life, we can find ways to imitate His humility and become a grace to our world, while also learning that true humility is the path to the gifts of the Holy Spirit that God wants to give us for our ultimate happiness, fulfillment, and well-being.

Jesus: Born in Humility

If we could imagine God’s entry into the human world, we would think of Him coming with great glory and majesty. After all, He is the author, creator, and sustainer of all life! But it’s here, at the very beginning of Christianity’s story, that God shows us to expect the unexpected.

Rather than being born in power and glory, Jesus is born in a stable. It is among farm animals that He makes His entry into our world. The angels announce the greatest joy in human history not to kings and princes, but to shepherds, lowly and working in the fields. It has been said that God chose to enter the world in this way to remove any barriers between us, the created, and our Creator. Salvation came for all people, but Christ identifies closely with the poor, the downtrodden, and those born into great challenges. There is no poverty that He himself didn’t experience—and His birth is just the first of many humbling experiences that will mark His earthly ministry.

Writing for *Aleteia* about the early Church Fathers’

Jesus does not expect us to become famous through our talents or amass great wealth. However, if those things do happen to us, we have to remain grounded in the truth that Jesus came to share.

Former NFL quarterback Tim Tebow gave an interview to the *Christian Broadcasting Network*, focusing on the virtue of humility. He noted, “The Bible says the exalted shall be humbled, and the humble shall be exalted. You have to be a servant...You have to think, how can I help someone, how can I be of service. We get so busy in the race of life, caught up in how we can improve and do this and get money and get famous...You don’t need to do this if it makes you so proud and only focused on yourself. But if you can constantly stay focused on Christ and serving other people and making a difference in their life, that automatically changes your outlook and what you do every day.”

interpretation of Christ’s humble beginnings, author Tom Hoopes distills this wisdom from the patriarchs: “By becoming a baby, Jesus reveals His whole plan for our lives. Seeing Him, we know what to do: An infant has no voice, so we have to speak for Him; an infant can’t walk, so we have to bring Him to others. His manger shows us what to value: by becoming a refugee child He shows us to seek God’s protection, not worldly power; and family love, not material possessions.”

“And Jesus in the manger needs all Seven Works of Mercy: He needs to be housed, fed, given drink and clothed; He is visited like a sick person or prisoner; and He is even prepared for burial, with myrrh....The Fathers of the Church saw the meaning of Christmas clearly, but their formulation of it has been so long forgotten that it now seems scandalous.” God became man so that we humans could partake in His divine nature.

Catholic singer Sarah Hart recently spoke to The Christophers about her Christmas album and the thought that went into it. She reflected, through her musical work, on her love for the mystery of the Incarnation—and what God’s humble birth means for all of us.

Sarah observed, “For Him to come as a king in a completely powerless state is such an incredible, beautiful image. To literally say, ‘I come as the poor, I come as the weak, I come as the innocent, I come as the stranger and the immigrant,’ and that list goes on and on. In writing [my song], ‘Lowly the Cradle,’ it was important for me to

address the humility of God. I worry about a culture where we focus too much on God as power and contorting God in our image...The way that Christ came to us is the antithesis of a lot of what’s happening in the world right now: to come humbly and quietly, to fall among us to lowly birth parents with no money and no stature, but people who had love and kindness to give.”

The Humble Rabbi and Teacher

The men Jesus called to build His Church, the apostles, were themselves humble, working men. And at the Last Supper, He humbled Himself by washing their feet and setting an example of how they should serve others. When Christ shared His teachings, He often used parables with language and settings the people of His day could understand. His ministry focused on people who were poor, vulnerable, forgotten, and discarded, reminding us that God chooses to be among the humble of His world.

Even at His crucifixion, Jesus set an example of humility. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, actor Jonathan Jackson (*General Hospital*, *Nashville*) shared his perspective on this idea from his own faith tradition: “In the Orthodox Church, there’s a title for Christ. He’s called The Great Humility... And there’s an icon that is called The Great Humility...where Christ’s head is tilted down from voluntarily accepting the sins of the world for us. There’s such beauty there...The humility of taking on our flesh...receiving beatings and

mockery and spitting and false witness and all of these things, and never returning any of that except with love, grace, mercy, and truth. To be hanging on the cross and say in that moment—not philosophically or ideologically preaching forgiveness—but literally hanging from the cross saying, ‘Father, forgive them,’ that is just incredible.”

The Ultimate Sacrifice

Christ’s willingness to accept death on a cross is the most powerful act of humility the world has ever seen. It has inspired saints throughout the generations, including St. Maximilian Kolbe.

Father Kolbe was a Polish priest when his country was conquered by the Nazis in 1939. In 1941, he was arrested, along with other members of his monastery, in part due to the anti-Nazi stance their newspaper was running.

He was sent to prison and then to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where he was subjected to beatings and deprivations. When another prisoner escaped the barracks, the guards randomly selected 10 men to die by starvation. One of those men, a father and husband, fell to the ground wailing for his family. Father Kolbe stepped forward and offered to take the man’s place. Stunned, the commandant overseeing the heinous act agreed.

Father Kolbe knew he was going to die a horrible death, and yet he did so willingly. He spent the last two weeks of his life encouraging his nine companions by leading them in prayers and

singing hymns. On August 14, 1941, the vigil of the Feast of the Assumption, Father Kolbe was one of four prisoners in the bunker still alive. The Nazi guards executed him by means of a lethal injection and burned his body in the crematorium.

The man he saved, Franciszek Gajowniczek, survived Auschwitz and the war. He never stopped talking about Father Kolbe. In an interview with the *National Catholic Register* years after the war, he said: “I wanted to live so that Father Kolbe’s sacrifice wouldn’t be in vain. I protected myself twice as hard. That’s how he saved me a second time. He gave me strength—I think from heaven. How could I waste his life? He offered it so I could live with my wife and enjoy my sons.”

In 1982, Gajowniczek was present at Maximilian Kolbe’s canonization at St. Peter’s Basilica. In imitating Christ’s most humble sacrifice, Father Kolbe offered a powerful witness to the Christian faith. He lived out the famous verse in the Gospel of John: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” He even went beyond it, by giving his life to save the life of a man he hardly knew.

We Can Start Today

Though we may never be called upon to give our lives to save someone else’s, we can imitate Christ’s humility in small ways each day. When we put others first, teach those who need instruction, and put our own ego to death, we are walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

It starts with the simple things: gratitude, faith, love for the poor and weak, seeing the best in others, and spending more time emulating Christ than pursuing worldly things. With humility, prayer, and repetition, God will supply us with the grace to turn our hearts into the greatest gift of all: the very heart of Jesus Christ.


**“It’s better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness.”**

A non-profit, founded in 1945 by Father James Keller, M.M., The Christophers encourages people to change the world for the better. Donations are tax-deductible. News Notes are published 10 times a year. Single copies are free.

President: Mary Ellen Robinson
Editor-in-Chief: Tony Rossi

The Christophers

264 West 40th Street, Suite 603, New York, NY 10018
212-759-4050, ext. 241

mail@christophers.org • www.christophers.org

Christopher News Note 680

ISBN: 8755-69601

*“When pride comes, then comes
disgrace; but wisdom is with
the humble.”*

—Proverbs 11:2