Tr17(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Yesterday was the Feast of St. Michael. Now Michael is the only **arch**-angel mentioned in the OT and NT. Gabriel is mentioned as the one who visits Mary at the Annunciation in the NT, but he is not actually called an "Arch" angel. Similarly, the Arch-angel Raphael is mentioned as the one who visits Tobit in the book by that name in the OT *Apocrypha*, but he also is not called and ARCH-angel. Another Archangel, Uriel, appears in another Apocryphal book (*2nd Esdras*). According to non-canonical literature there may be as many as nine such archangels.

Four archangels appear in Islamic literature as well. Michael and Gabriel however are the only ones universally recognized by all three Abrahamic faiths. Both Mormonism and Jehovah's witnesses also recognize Michael, as the chief of all the angels.

The word angel most commonly is used to refer to all spiritual beings in heaven. St. Paul points out that angels and archangels are only two of nine such differing types of servants to the Divine. The others being Thrones, Powers, Mights, Principalities, Dominions. There are two others mentioned in the OT: Seraphim and Cherubim. They are mentioned in Isaiah and Ezekiel, and in Second Samuel and Psalm 18. All of them, regardless of title, in one way or another serve God, such as angels bringing messages to humans, and thus are servants of the Trinity. Some are assigned the job of being guardians to us.

Finally, St. Michel is honored throughout the Roman, Lutheran, and Anglican world. The Orthodox honor all angels in November. In England the universities and courts begin their *Michelmas* term either on Tuesday or the following Monday. In fact, this English court tradition is still carried on in our courts. And this is why our Supreme court always begins its term on the first Monday in October, in two days.

Now today is a Sunday with some vocabulary which needs explaining. The first word we need to clear up is the word “prevent” which—I mentioned a few weeks back-- that we would we hear in our opening Collect for today: "Lord we pray that thy grace may always “*prevent* and follow us”.

This does not mean that we hope the Lord will stop us from good works. Rather, prevent is being used with its original, today archaic, meaning from Latin “*prevenire”* meaning “to go before”... smoothing the way so to speak. In modern usage we instead would say “guide” or “direct”, as we do in our newer prayers. In short then, we prayed earlier for the Lord's grace to *surround* us.

The second word is “vocation”. A vocation has not been historically really viewed as the same as a *jo*b, although it frequently today is used as such. Instead, it comes from the Latin verb “*vocare*” meaning "to call". Thus, a more accurate definition would be to say that a vocation is: a calling towards a particular course of action. Today it most frequently is used to refer to those who believe they are *called* to religious life as either monastics or ordained clergy. But we also speak of doctors having a “call to heal”. St. Paul, however, is using the word here to say that **all** Christians have a *calling* to live a certain life, or in modern lingo, a certain “lifestyle”.

*“ and he spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?...And he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”*

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Jesus had been invited to a sabbath dinner at a Pharisee's house. The Gospel points out that, “they watched him”. They were going to scrutinize his every move. There were many rules and potential stumbling blocks at such a dinner. It is not unreasonable to wonder whether the man with the dropsy actually had been planted by the host to give Jesus something more to trip over.

The Sabbath was full of rules to insure no work was done. Meals had to have been cooked the day before and, if to be eaten warm, kept warm such as in dry but not wet straw, and never in sand, so that the warming food did not cook anymore. Thus, crock pots would not have been allowed.

The rules forbidding work were such that one who became injured could only put a bandage upon it to keep it from getting worse, but could not clean it since that was viewed as work. The policy however did not extend to livestock. If, for example, your animal fell into a hole, one could work up all the sweat one needed to rescue it.

Jesus simply asked those watching him to explain why one could help a suffering animal on the Sabbath, but not a fellow human being. Upon their silence he healed the man of the dropsy, and began a parable about humility.

While the parable might seem to be a non sequitur to what Jesus just had done, namely, healing someone, it actually follows on the incident quite nicely. The purpose of rules is to demarcate what is right and what is wrong. We, thus, are able to say objectively, “I was good and you were bad”. Our emotions however, especially one called pride, are such that we begin to feel superior to others since **we** were able to “stay between the lines” while they were not.

The lawyers and Pharisee's at the dinner were intent on following all the rules so that they could feel good about themselves. As we would say, they did not have the correct “perspective”. They put following rules and regulations aimed at promoting goodness ahead of actually doing goodness. No doubt they would have thought, “this man has had the dropsy for a while, it can wait until morning”. Yet, they would have rushed out on the Sabbath to help one of their injured goats.

Thus, Jesus makes a point about keeping things in perspective. Despite what PETA might say, humans are more important than goats. Jesus himself points this out not infrequently in his teachings. (We are worth more than many sparrows.)

Pride leads us to get things out of perspective. We become self-centered. Self-centeredness is a problem for humans. It turns us in onto ourselves and necessarily away from God and his creations, including others. And this is why monastics take three vows: obedience, celibacy, and poverty. They are called the "Evangelical Counsels". They prevent being self-centered and open one to God's will.

Humility, not surprisingly, is the cure, which was the point of the second half of this passage. This parable about a banquet, told by Jesus probably at a banquet since he was becoming a famous person, points out the **need** we have for humility.

Then as now, at a banquet the most important guests usually arrive last. Imagine the audacity we would feel if we witnessed someone whom we knew had been invited only as an afterthought to our child's wedding sitting down at the table reserved for the wedding party! Imagine our embarrassment if we did the same in a foreign culture not knowing what was appropriate?!

Humility is not easy to come by though. Pride is so much more fun. But humility is a trademark of many great people, and not just saints. We may remember from our US history classes some stories about George Washington.

One legend I may have talked about before, which I really enjoy, recalls Washington passing through a camp without his usual entourage and his rank not visible when he saw soldiers struggling to raise a beam for a fortification. A corporal was barking out commands.

Gen Washington asked the corporal whether he had pondered helping his men to speed up the process, to which the corporal pointed out **his** rank. Gen. Washington proceeded then to help the soldiers finish the job himself. Upon completion he told the arrogant corporal, “if you ever need help again, corporal, just let your commander-in-chief know.”

Humility can manifest itself in people one might not associate humility with, such as the ultra-rich. Most people who give large amounts of money to universities seek to get their name on the building or on a plaque anyway. Sometimes though the university comes to bear their name, such as Carnegie-Mellon or Stanford, or Yale.

Yet, at the end of the 19th century the world's richest man, the baptist oil billionaire John D. Rockefeller, unlike other financial tycoons of his time and despite his enormous generosity to the now world renown University of Chicago sought to remain **anonymous**. All that bears the Rockefeller name there is its "chapel", which seats 1,700.

How do we work on our humility? We need to recognize that there are two areas or realms where we need to grow in humility to fight pride, namely in the areas of intellectual knowledge and in our spirit. But the approach is the same for both.

We need to compare ourselves and our accomplishments not to each other, but to the best. Those who would be proud of their musical accomplishments should remember that both Mozart and Schubert had been dead for over three years by the time their 40th birthdays would have rolled around.

Those who have intellectual pride need to ponder that there are many, many areas where they no nothing. Indeed, as we see in the news regularly, some of our most successful people in society are completely incompetent at, say, staying out of trouble or at raising a healthy, happy family.

Spiritually, when we think we are pretty saintly compared to other folk, we need to compare ourselves to God or at least to his saints to see just how far we have to go. Many a proud clergyman has wanted to hide in a corner after hearing an address from a truly humble servant, such as Mother Teresa.

While the story about General Washington is legend, it is NOT a legend that among all the great honorees present at the 1979 Nobel Awards ceremony Mother Teresa refused to eat her dinner after winning the Peace prize, and asked instead that it be given to the needy. AMEN. +