

Bennochy church 27th August 2017

What image comes to your mind, when you think about the word 'humility'. Give you a few seconds to think about that.

This is part of an online article about humility, from Huffington Post

In a society where fortune favors the strong, modesty is often seen as a weakness. Climbing to the top of a corporate ladder is our modern version of “survival of the fittest” — and for that reason, meekness is often under-appreciated. But turns out, the secret to success and fulfillment may very well lie in the ability to express humility. Mike Austin, professor of philosophy at Eastern Kentucky University is quoted as saying, *“In general, most traditions, religious or philosophical, believe that certain character traits make up a good person — and a lot of those attributes are enhanced by humility,”* So how do we add a little more humility to our lives? The article goes on to list seven traits humble people have mastered that allow them to live accomplished, fulfilled and happy lives. Here is the list, see if it matches with any of your own thoughts.

They focus their energy on others.

They're conscientious.

Their moral compass guides their decision-making.

They see happiness as a journey.

They excel as leaders.

They know good things lie ahead — and they're OK waiting for them.

They have strong relationships. (Jul 17, 2014)

Here's another way of looking at humility and it is the example of Benjamin Franklin. It comes from 'Relevant magazine' (online), *When Ben Franklin turned 20, he was determined to become virtuous. He put together a list of 12 virtues (frugality, sincerity, justice, etc.), and worked out a system of regularly focusing on one virtue a week while tracking his progress as he went. He showed his finished list of values to a minister who pointed out that Franklin was missing humility—the queen of all virtues. Franklin added it to the list bringing the total to 13.*

After spending many months working on the virtues, Franklin's friend asked how he was doing with humility. Franklin responded, “I can't boast of much success in acquiring the reality of this virtue, but I had a good deal with regard to the appearance of it.” The point is, if you're working hard at acting humble, you're not actually humble.

Virtues are a lot like garments; you can put them on without owning them. It's tricky because we don't just fool the people around us by playing dress up—we fool ourselves. Humility is much easier to manufacture than it is to internalize, and as long as we're more focused on humility's appearance, we'll never experience its transformation.

(March 23, 2016)

If you had to define humility, what words would you choose. Here are the words of CS Lewis, I think this is a great definition of humility, *“True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.”*

The examples of Jesus, in the words of Paul to the church at Philippi, and his example of washing the feet of his disciples, demonstrates an important aspect of humility that we have not mentioned yet. It is this, the one who is powerful, serves others. Their power is used as a means of humility. In other words, humility is not about weakness. It is about showing greatness, by acting as a servant. As he washed his disciples feet, Jesus deliberately set power, as we understand it, aside.

Walking in sandals on the filthy roads of Israel in the first century made it imperative that feet be washed before a communal meal, especially since people reclined at a low table and feet were very much in evidence. When Jesus rose from the table and began to wash the feet of the disciples. He was doing the work of the lowliest of servants. The disciples must have been stunned at this act of humility and condescension, that Christ, their Lord and master, should take off his outer garment, wash the feet of His disciples, when it was their proper work to have washed His.

Note how Peter reacts. The bold Peter, this is the man who declared Christ as Messiah and had a go at walking on water. He gets it all wrong. First it is no, Jesus, you are not doing that.

Then when Jesus says, if you want to be my disciples, I have to, Peter goes to the opposite end of the spectrum, till totally wrong, and says to Jesus, wash me all over! I will have a bath! Jesus said to him, just your feet Peter, that's all I need to do. In God you are already cleansed. His actions anticipated his death to come, pointed to the cleansing power of baptism and repeated in the act of communion.

This enacted parable had extra significant for those gathered around the table. For not long before, some of them had been arguing, about who among them, was the greatest. (Luke 22: 24) Jesus said to them, *“I am telling you the truth: no slaves are greater than their master, and no messengers are greater than the one who sent them. Now that you know this truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice”.* (v 16-17)

'Put it into practice'. Philippians chapter two is not about the spiritual realm, or some just ancient quote from the Old Testament, it is about the practice of Jesus, in the language of the suffering servant of God. Setting aside his divinity, to the obedience of God and for his honour, and for the salvation of humanity, Jesus humbles himself to death on a Roman cross. Power is laid aside. Paul says our attitude should be the same, by living out the humble life. *“... be humble towards one another, always considering others better than yourselves.”* (v3) and others will look out for our interests.

We might not literally take up the towel or the bowl of water the feet of others, but in humility, we are asked to serve one another. Amen.