

6th Sunday of Easter

May 5-6, 2018

Readings: Acts 10:25-48; 1 John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17

“Get up. I myself am also a human being.” These words by none other than St. Peter himself offer a glimpse both into his humanity as well as an admission of how the grace of God animated the early Church. By now, he was known, perhaps more so than he had ever imagined. He also appears to be a bit uneasy with all the attention he was receiving, unequal to the display of reverence afforded him by the Centurion, himself almost assuredly a Gentile.

Who of us, deep down, would really desire to have such a display mounted towards us? In fact, we are more surprised with praise than we are with criticism. We have so become accustomed to criticism that we may be a little suspicious if people are too nice. The word used here is normally translated as ‘to worship,’ though here it is used in the more general sense ‘pay homage, reverence’.¹ Bowing down before another may be found in the Old Testament as a respectful gesture, such as in Genesis and Exodus.²

So, why was Peter uncomfortable with the display of reverence. It is most likely due to the fact that he knew all too well his weakness and was thinking to himself- “If this soldier only knew to whom he was speaking.” It was a sign of humility for Peter to be embarrassed, however well-intentioned the Centurion may have been.

Years ago, while attending the Rosary Procession held right here, I would run into protesters. It was like clockwork. One man said to me-“I was a Catholic for fifty years, and I left the Church because you people worship Mary.” Where to begin?!

We honor Mary and that is very different from worship. The Latin word *reverendus* means worthy of respect; it is in fact, an abbreviation

¹ See David Peterson, “The Acts of the Apostles,” Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2009, page 333

² See Genesis 18:2; 23:7; Exodus 11:8; 18:7

for members of the clergy, one that I hope we earn by means of our authentic witness. But in Catholic circles, it is because of whom the priest represents more than anything about the priest himself.

“Father” is a sign of respect for the office of the priesthood, just as officer does the same for one committed to serve in public safety. As a priest, being addressed as “Father” connotes what ought to be a relationship of spiritual fatherhood towards the people. The priest is to be a loving father, caring for and solicitous for the good of the people entrusted to his care.

Even Saint Paul used the terminology of spiritual father in his First Letter to the Corinthians. “Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”³

Reverence shown to human beings shows forth our respect for their experience. I was taught a particular way to answer the phone as a child; I called adults Mr. or Mrs. And was very careful about every raising a voice to an adult. Even after ordination, it was a little difficult to start calling some people by their first names, even as a 25-year-old! A culture of respect was instilled in us- Deo gratias.

When we reverence Jesus in the Eucharist, when we truly stop to receive Holy Communion deliberately and carefully, we honor the Lord. We place our hands out, forming like unto an altar or, in the traditional manner, we extend our tongue and receive the host directly. Both are gestures of receptivity, appropriate since we do not seize the Eucharist as a prize or possession.

We bow slightly before receiving and step aside to make a sign of the Cross as we return to the pew. In reverencing Christ in our hearts, we will bear fruit that will last!

³ Cf. 1 Corinthians 4:15

We must always guard against hero worship or showing greater reverence to human beings than is appropriate, whether to athletes or film stars. I respect the office of bishop and while I can appreciate the ancient custom of the kissing of the ring, I personally believe that other ways seem better suited to today.

But the reverence shown to the Lord will always remain firm and constant. By means of a genuflection, we reverence the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. For those who may find it difficult to genuflect, a profound bow is an acceptable alternative, as both show reverence to the real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. When we reverence Christ in our hearts, we do so because the greatest honor and glory belongs to Him. It is more than honor for the Lord; He is our Savior.

Anyone who lives out the baptismal call from Jesus in a faithful way is worthy of honor and reverence from us, because that person has cooperated with God's grace. [We honor our First Communicants today, and show you reverence on this most special day in your spiritual life. You are set aside today, but really in doing this, we are also recognizing that our Lord is with you today in a deeper way than up to this point.] We reverence Christ first- all else flows from that. To Him be the honor, the power and the glory.