

## Homily — 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

*“May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable to Thee, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen”*

Part of my priestly vocation is a call to the military chaplaincy (in the South African National Defence Force). I have always seen the chaplaincy as an extension of that (priestly) office. God calls us to minister to others and be witness of His infinite grace, mercy, compassion, and love in the world – in the particular situations that people find themselves in... To be his “hands” and “feet” (cf. Rom. 10:15), bringing with us comfort, consolation, healing, and hope in a broken, fallen, and hurting world. Mine is therefore, a military environment.

Today’s Gospel finds Jesus – after having encountered, touched, and healed a leprous man – entering Capernaum (which was where He stayed, at St. Peter’s house, alongside the Sea of Galilee). A military man, a Centurion (which was a position in the Roman army during late antiquity, an officer, usually in command of about 100 men) came up to Jesus beseeching him for help, *“saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented”* (Matt. 8:5). Palsy is a truly debilitating disease that causes paralysis and is often accompanied by sudden and involuntary tremors. It is interesting – as a side note – that Roman soldiers, of all people, were hated and ridiculed by the Jews of Jesus’ day, being seen as controlling oppressors of the nation. Yet, here is this man, who is *“a man under authority, having soldiers under”* him, who *“sayeth unto this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh”* (Matt. 8:9), coming to Jesus for help. His concern is great for his suffering servant.

The words the Centurion speaks on meeting Jesus have since become memorialised and resonate within the annals of Church history, even until this very day... Words we repeat in a whisper, so often, with the deepest of humility, every time the Mass is offered:

*“Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed”* – (Matt. 8:8).

That was the Centurion’s stance, his approach: One of absolute humility. And in doing so, this nameless Roman officer becomes the prototype for all Christians who come before Jesus with their needs and supplications. In order for us to approach Christ, we need to clothe ourselves in humility. In fact, I would go as far as to suggest that Christians should be the most humble of people on earth! Why, you ask? Because like the Centurion, we have surely come to know and experience something of God’s infinite greatness and worth before our own unworthiness and sin.

Jesus, marvels at the approach of this man, who was set within the ranks of command. If the Centurion gave an order, it was executed. Everyone had a responsibility and they all worked towards a common goal. And here’s the thing: the Centurion – despite his authority and power, a man that would have had to work extremely hard to climb the chain of command – realised that ultimately, it was Jesus of Galilee who was in command of life itself! It would not have been easy for a man of his stature to realise this, and so we find, clearly here, the deep humility of his soul on display. This is something of which we all need to take note. Humble obedience is a great lesson, for us all. Why? Because:

Firstly, we learn that humility is largely about recognising that God has the power and you and I do not. So often in life we think it is all about us: My position, my status, my power, my abilities etc. Jesus is in control, He is in “command,” He decides what happens in your life and mine... It’s not about us! This is where so many divisions occur. Even within our Churches: we find pride, self, and “me-ism” getting in the way: My way or no other way. This response lacks humility, compassion, charity, and love. It acknowledges not God’s command and control over situations. Pastor Andrew Murray was quite correct when he said: *“Pride must die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you.”*

Secondly, humility is demonstrated in subserviently coming to Jesus; surrendering to Him. When one relinquishes control over the problem, challenge, or difficulty that is being experienced, one displays humility. And that is something He will respond to. For, “*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble*” (Jam. 4:6).

And thirdly, humble obedience requires us to recognise that we don’t *deserve* Jesus. We sadly live in an age of entitlement – the misguided belief that we somehow inherently just ‘deserve’ things. Take note, that the Centurion went to Jesus with the expectation that Jesus *could* heal his servant, not the expectation that Jesus *had* to heal his servant. Indeed, our contrite and underserved approach to God should always be just like that of the Centurion: “*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*”

No matter who one is – no matter how powerful, or what position one has – Christ requires humility of us all. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. Come therefore, Brethren, before Christ, this day, with the attitude of reverence and humble obedience... Invite Him into your heart by opening up to Him, asking Him in, and in doing so, we will begin to understand what it means to have faith like that of the Centurion, of which Jesus remarked:

“*Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith as this in anyone in Israel*” (Matt. 8:10).

May God bless you, as you seek to humbly follow Him, this day, and forevermore.

✝ *In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*



*Jesus and the Centurion*