

“Empty and Full” Phil 2:5–11
PalmSunB18 3-25-18

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. With these words, written from prison, Paul begins his letter to the Philippian church. He thanks God for their faith and partnership with him in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He describes his joy that his imprisonment is giving him greater opportunity to share Christ. As his partners in the Gospel, he rejoices that they have the privilege not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer with Him.

In that context he begins chapter two, instructing them to maintain the same love, spirit, and purpose. They are not to regard themselves as better than others, but rather look out for each others' interests as they do their own. In other words, have the mind of Christ. To be full, be empty.

This familiar text appears every Palm Sunday as it clearly reveals that Christ emptied himself and then became full again of the Father's glory. Paul teaches that as our Lord emptied himself and was then made full by God in all glory, so we are to imitate him.

But even in this context these verses are about much more than Christ as our example. They tell us how Christ saved us and empowers us to love each other. Only because Christ emptied himself can we even think of doing the same. Paul writes in the next verses: “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*” Only by Christ filling us with grace and peace can we dare to empty ourselves of our ego and self concern.

Present and past students of the catechism recognize this text as the most concise description of what is called the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. Humiliation does not mean embarrassment, but rather a lower position. Paul says that Christ did not cease to be God, but rather did not hold fast to the full power of his divine nature. The Apostle's creed describes it this way: “born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried”. For Christ to die for sinners, he had to let them kill him but tying one arm behind his back to make it fair.

What does that look like for you to empty yourself? You have no divine power to give up, but you do have a sinful human nature that needs to be emptied in service to God and to those with whom you work, worship, and live. That's often hard to do. If I empty myself, who is going to fill me? If I don't look out for me, who will?

More than ever before, we have no excuse to be ignorant of the needs of others. With a few clicks of the computer or phone we can know who needs help, how to pray, and where to send our money. And even that can be done with a few clicks on the keyboard.

Of course, knowing the needs and helping to meet them are not the same thing. The Law does not move us to love. To have the mind of Christ, we need the Gospel. We need to firmly trust that because Christ gave his life for us, we have peace and security in God. In him we have all things, so we are never empty by emptying ourselves.

A Christian is like a water trough kept full by a float that allows more water in as the level gets low enough to open the valve. When we empty ourselves, God is always filling us. If instead, we

hoard God's love within us we become like a bucket of stagnant water—we stink, attract bugs, and become bitter.

The cross on which Christ humbled himself to die reminds us that we have nothing to lose in the presence of God. Our sin is paid for, our punishment is canceled. God accepts us through our faith in His Son. He gives us abundant life here and eternal life hereafter. God sealed that deal by raising Jesus from the dead and filling him with His glory and authority over all things.

Jesus said, "Because I live, you also will live". We can have the mind of Christ because we have the life of Christ. Jesus also said that by faith in him we have already passed over from death to life. Not will, but already.

Christ is not only our example of being empty and full, He is also the means of doing so. If we are empty of self-righteousness that seeks to please God by good works, by faith we can be full of Christ's righteousness that alone saves us moves us to love others.

So Grace and peace to you, from He who emptied himself, so that you could be full. Amen