

Humility: The Doorway To Our "Real Selves"?

It has been said that human beings are three things. They are who they perceive themselves to be, they are who others perceive them to be and they are who they truly are. How do we know if what we think of ourselves is truly our real identity? Jesus inquired of his disciples whether or not they understood his real identity.

"Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. (Matt 16:13-17) Jesus understood the great mystery of identity all too well. The people surrounding Jesus had one impression of who He was, while at the same time, it is revealed that his disciples knew an entirely different person. The key to knowing Christ is given to us in Jesus' words: "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven". The teaching is that knowledge of God the Father is only given to those whom Jesus chooses to reveal.

"All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." (Luke 10: 22-24)

Privately, Jesus speaks these amazing words: 'Blessed are the eyes which see what you see!' We must ask ourselves what was it about the disciples' that allowed their eyes to be open and what was it in the eyes of Christ that He saw in them that he in turn "shows" Himself as the Messiah? Perhaps, we will never really know what took place to facilitate God's revealing of Himself - every revelation is truly a mystery in the deepest sense. If there is an answer however, it must be found in the relationship that came into existence between these former fishermen and the person of Christ.

Scripture reveals that as these ordinary fishermen were invited into a relationship with Christ a radical transformation takes place in their understanding of vocation and family - identity. "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him." (Matt. 4:20) They left their professions and families in order to enter into a relationship with the Messiah.

A new identity was born in the hearts and souls of these men. In fact, one might say they discovered who they truly were the moment Jesus came to them and opened their souls to His presence. At that moment, they encountered the power of humility and love and their lives were never the same.

St. John Climacus describes holy humility in terms of it being the fruit of a relational nature.

"Humility is grace in the soul and with a name known only to those who have experience of it. It is indescribable wealth, a name and gift from God. 'Learn from me,' He said, that is, not from an angel, not from a man, not from a book, but 'from me,' that is, from my dwelling within you, from My illumination and action within you, for 'I am gentle and meek of heart' (Matt 11:29) in thought and spirit, and your souls will find rest from conflicts and relief from evil thoughts."

Christ invites us continually to be renewed and transformed much in the same way he called the disciples. He calls to us from our professional careers and families and teaches us that these things are not the source of our true identity. Identity is not to be found in what we do, but it is found in our relationship with God. This relationship is what changes lives. In these terms, Christianity is more than a "belief system" it is a WAY OF LIFE.

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