

Palm Sunday C Second Reading

[Phil 2:6-11](#)

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Jerome Biblical Commentary

(b) HARMONY (2:1-2). 1. *if there is any encouragement in Christ*: Paul affectionately adjures the Philippians by what they should esteem most. If “union with Christ” (en Christō) means anything, then it should be an encouragement, an incentive of life, to which he can appeal for his second recommendation of community harmony (cf. Rom 15:5; see B. Reicke, “Unité chrétienne et diaconie, Phil ii. 1-11,” *Neotestamentica et patristica* [Fest. O. Cullmann; NovTSup 6 (1962)] 203-12.)

Fest. Festschrift (generic name for *any* publication honoring a person)

NovTSup Novum Testamentum Supplements (Leiden)

16 (c) HUMILITY (2:3-11). His third counsel is an exhortation to humility. **3.** *do not act for selfish ends*: For the meaning of the difficult word *eritheia* (self-seeking) see comment on Rom 2:8. Paul is probably referring to the base motives of 1:17; he fears that petty jealousies are at work among them (cf. 4:2); he counsels humility, selflessness, and concern for others as a remedy. **5.** *have for one another the attitude which Christ Jesus had*: Lit., “have this attitude among you which was also in Christ Jesus.” The second *en* with the dative is understood as an equivalent of the simple dative (expressing possession; cf. *GrBib* § 120). In this interpretation Paul exhorts the Philippians to an imitation of Christ; his humility and abasement would be the model for the conduct that should be found in the Philippian community. But it is also possible to render the verse, “Have for one another that attitude which you also have in Christ Jesus.” In this case the vb. *phroneite* is supplied in the rel. clause. The sense would then be: Let the vital union between you and Christ so come to the fore as to manifest itself in your harmonious and self-effacing conduct with others. The stress is not on the moral imitation of Jesus, but on the vital principle of new Christian communal life.

17 Into this hortatory context Paul inserts a hymn to Christ, possibly of Jewish-Christian liturgical origin, which he has modified slightly by adding the words, “even death upon a cross.” The hymn represents an early kerygmatic confession. The hymnic interpretation of this section is based on the rhythmic quality of the sentences, on the use of parallelism (found in OT psalms and poetry), and on the rare, characteristically un-Pauline expressions (*kenoun*, meaning “to empty,” *harpagmos*, *hyperypsoun*, *morphē*, *schēma*, *isa theō einai*). Though there appear to be two periodic sentences, each is composed of nine cola and the whole is conveniently divided into six strophes. Each strophe has a main verb and two subordinate determinations (*thanatou de staurou* is an addition *extra metrum*). In the first three strophes Christ is the subject; in the last three, God. Strophes 3 and 6 begin in Greek with *kai*. The version shown at the bottom of this page follows the arrangement of E. Lohmeyer (*Kyrios Jesus. Eine Untersuchung u/ber Phil. 2.5-11* [= *SHAW Phil.-Hist. Kl.*, 1927-28, 4. Abh.; 2nd ed., 1961]; *An die Philipper*, 90).

6	Who, though of divine status, did not treat like a miser's booty his right to be like God,	Divine Pre-existence
7	but emptied himself of it, to take up the status of a slave and become like men;	Humiliation of Incarnation
8	having assumed human form, he still further humbled himself	Humiliation of Death

GrBib M. Zerwick, *Graecitas biblica* (4th ed.; Rome, 1960). Numbers correspond to English tr., *Biblical Greek* (Rome, 1963)

OT Old Testament

SHAW *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*

with an obedience that meant death—
even death upon a cross!

- | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------------|
| 9 | That is why God has so greatly exalted
him and given him the name
which is above all others: | Celestial Exaltation |
| 10 | that everyone at Jesus' name
should bend his knee
in heaven, on earth, and under the earth! | Adoration by the Universe |
| 11 | that every tongue should proclaim
unto the glory of God the Father
that Jesus Christ is LORD! | Jesus' New Title: <i>Kyrios</i> |

18 **6. who:** Paul proposes to the Philippians the historical Christ who enjoyed according to this hymnic confession of the early Church also a divine pre-existent quality and an exalted celestial reward. *of divine status:* Lit., “originally being in the form of God; having as a possession the form of God.” The “form of God” (*morphē theou*) is not to be understood in an Aristotelian sense, expressing Jesus’ internal constitution (*Physics* 1.7 [190b 20]); nor even in the patristic sense, expressing “God’s nature” (*physis*: Chrysostom, *PG* 62.219; Theodoret, *PG* 82.569). For the word *morphē* expresses rather the “outward appearance,” and is only so used in the LXX (Jgs 8:18; Jb 4:16; Is 44:3; Dn 3:19; 4:3; 5:6, 9, 5:10; 7:28). In the Gk world *morphē theou* was used for the external (usually human) form of a god in a theophany. For a Jew, however, to think of God in a human form was out of the question (cf. Josephus, *AgAp* 2.22 § 190). The equivalent of the external form of God in the OT would be his “glory” (Hebr *kābôd*; Gk *doxa*); cf. Ex 16:10; 24:15; Lv 9:6, 23; Nm 14:10; etc. If *morphē* is understood in this hymn to refer to Jesus’ possession of that quality associated with the external manifestation of Yahweh in the OT, then it can be said that he was of divine status. *did not treat like a miser’s booty:* Lit., “considered it not a thing-to-be-clutched [-at].” The word *harpagmos* is rare. Derived from *harpazō* (seize), it has been understood actively as an “act of plundering” (Vg *rapina*). But this meaning is usually rejected today. What would Jesus be plundering? Passively, it could mean either a “prize, booty” to be snatched at (*res rapienda*) or a “prize held fast, snatched to oneself” (*res rapta et retinenda*). Commentators have debated the pros and cons of these two nuances, and even of a third meaning of *harpagmos* (= windfall, godsend, piece of luck). (See P.

PG J. Migne, *Patrologia graeca* (Paris)

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

Gk Greek

AgAp Josephus, *Against Apion*

Hebr Hebrew

Vg Vulgate (common Latin version of the Bible)

Henry, *VDBS* 5, 22-27; L. Bouyer, *RSR* 39 [1951] 281-88; H. Kruse, *VD* 27 [1949] 355-60; *VD* 29 [1951] 206-14.) We prefer the sense of *res rapta et retinenda* as the one most in keeping with the context: Jesus did not treat the status of divine glory (i.e., being equal with God) as a privilege or possession to be clutched so tenaciously that it might be exploited in the future; it was not for him a miser's booty. *his right to be like God*: Lit., "to be equal with God." This expresses in another way what his divine status was. Although Jesus possessed divine equality and its consequent privilege to appear like Yahweh in glory, he did not stand on his dignity. Some would see here an implicit comparison with Adam (J. Héring, O. Cullmann, L. Bouyer, P. Bonnard, *et al.*) as the heavenly man. But none of the reasons for this interpretation are really convincing.

19 **7. emptied himself**: Jesus, in becoming man, divested himself of the privilege of divine glory; he did not empty himself of divinity, but of the status of glory to which he had a right and which would be restored at his exaltation (cf. Jn 17:5; Mt 17:1-8). His voluntary giving up of *doxa* was the humiliation of the incarnation. *the status of a slave*: The use of *morphē*, "form of a slave," shows that it is not to be understood as expressive of intrinsic constitution. It refers to the condition of a slave. There is a double contrast: (1) with *morphē theou* (2:6); (2) with the title *Kyrios*, which is ultimately to be bestowed on him. He who made himself a "slave" eventually became the "Lord." He who was equal to God did not cease to be such on becoming man and abasing himself (cf. 2 Cor 8:9; Heb 5:8. In the use of *doulos* there may be an allusion to the "Servant of Yahweh" (Is 52:13 [Aquila tr.]); cf. also Is 53:12 (MT: "He poured out his lifeblood to the utmost"); *morphē* also occurs in Is 52:14 (Aquila tr.). *become like men*: Not only did he become a real man, but was like all other men, without exceptional privileges; cf. Gal 4:4; Rom 8:3. *having assumed human form*: Lit., "in outward appearance found as a man." His external shape, as he appeared to men in the days of his flesh (Heb 5:7), was that of a man.**8. humbled himself**: An echo of Is 53:8 (LXX). This is the second stage of Jesus' humiliation. This stage sums up his whole life on earth and his devotion to the Father, which comes to a climax in death on the cross. *an obedience that meant death*: As was to be expected of a "servant" (*doulos*: cf. Rom 6:16-18; Col 3:22; Heb 5:8. That obedience was not ordinary, but heroic. *even death upon a cross*: The lowest depth of Jesus' humiliation is set forth in this phrase, added by Paul and expressive of the point farthest removed from his celestial and glorious status. From this nadir the upward movement of the hymn begins.**9. has so greatly exalted him**: Lit., "has superexalted him, raised him to the loftiest heights." The hymn refers to the ascension of Christ (cf. Eph 4:10). It is "Johannine" in its immediate passage from the cross to exaltation, and un-Pauline in its Passing over the resurrection. The Father has exalted Christ to a status that contrasts superabundantly with his condition of abasement. *the name which is*

VDBS F. Vigouroux, *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément* (7 Vols.; Paris, 1928-)

RSR *Recherches de science religieuse*

VD *Verbum domini*

MT Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)

above all others: Lit., “above every name.” The name is Kyrios, which appears at the end of the hymn; this LXX equivalent of ^adōnai (my Lord) was used as the substitute for the ineffable tetragrammaton YHWH. It is the name that surpasses that of all celestial beings (Eph 1:21; Heb 1:4; 1 Pt 3:22; → Pauline Theology, 79:59-67).**10. at Jesus’ name**: When Kyrios is pronounced. *should bend his knee*: In an act of religious devotion. The hymn alludes to Is 45:23 and transfers to the new Kyrios the adoration given there to Yahweh. It is a universal and cosmic adoration paid to a sovereign.**11. unto the glory of God the Father**: His occupying of the heavenly throne constitutes no rivalry to the Father, to Yahweh himself; rather his voluntary abasement and the acknowledgement paid to him by creation in his rewarded status bring honor to the Father. *Jesus Christ is Lord*: This essential profession of early Christian faith in Jesus forms the climax of the hymn. The same profession is echoed in 1 Cor 12:3; Rom 10:9; cf. Col 2:6. Jesus’ lordship involves a cosmic influence over all creation, as it is presented here. “Christ died and lived again that he might be Lord both of the dead and living” (Rom 14:9).

(Cerfaux, L., “L’hymne au Christ-Serviteur de Dieu [Phil. II, 6-11 = Is. LII, 13-LIII, 12],” *Miscellanea historica A. De Meyer* [Louvain, 1946] 1, 117-30; *Receuil L. Cerfaux* [Gembloux, 1954] 2, 425-38. Dupont, J., “Jésus-Christ dans son abaissement et son exaltation d’après Phil. 2, 6-11,” *RSR* 37 [1950] 500-514. Feuillet, A., “L’hymne christologique,” *RB* 72 [1965] 352-80, 481-507. Martin, R. P., *An Early Christian Confession: Philippians II.5-11 in Recent Interpretation* [London, 1960]. Stanley, D. M., “Carmenque Christo quasi Deo dicere...,” *CBQ* 20 [1958] 173-91. Talbert, C. H., “The Problem of Pre-existence in Philippians 2:6-11,” *JBL* 86 [1967] 141-53.)

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Haydock’s Catholic Commentary

Ver. 6. *Who being in the form*[1] *of God*, (that is truly, properly, and essentially God from eternity, as the ancient Fathers here observed against the Arians) *taking the form of a servant*, (i.e. taking upon him our human nature) became truly a man, and as man the servant of God, but remaining always God as before, *thought it not robbery*, no injury to his eternal Father, *to be equal*, to be esteemed, and to declare himself equal to God, to

Meyer H. A. W. Meyer, *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* (Göttingen)

RB *Revue biblique*

CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*

¹Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

be one thing with him: as on divers occasions he taught the people, as we have observed in the notes on St. John's gospel, &c. (Witham)

Ver. 7. *But debased himself:* divested himself of all the marks of greatness, for the love of mankind. The Greek text signifies, *he made himself void;*^[2] on which account Dr. Wells, instead of *made himself of no reputation*, as in the Protestant translation, has changed it into *emptied himself*; not but that the true Son of God must always remain truly God, as well as by his incarnation truly man, but that in him as man appeared no marks of his divine power and greatness. --- *Made to the likeness*^[3] *of men*, not only as to an exterior likeness and appearance, but at the same time truly man by uniting his divine person to the nature of man. --- *In shape*^[4] (or habit) *found as a man*: not clothed exteriorly only, as a man is clothed with a garment or coat, but found both as to shape and nature a man; and, as St. Chrysostom says, with the appearance of a sinful man, if we consider him persecuted by the Jews, and nailed to an infamous cross. (Witham)

Ver. 9. *God...hath given him a name, &c.* The name or word *Jesus* represents the dignity of him who is signified by the name, and who is exalted even as man, above all creatures in heaven, earth, and hell; all which creatures either piously reverence him, or are made subject to him against their will, that every tongue may confess our Lord *Jesus* to be now, and to have been always, in the glory of his Father, equal to him in substance and in all perfections. (Witham)

Ver. 10. If we shew respect when the name of our sovereign is mentioned, may we not express our respect also at the name of *Jesus*; and if to his name, why not to his cross as well as to the throne of the king?

Daily Bible Study Series

TRUE GODHEAD AND TRUE MANHOOD

Philippians 2:5–11

Have within yourselves the same disposition of mind as was in Christ *Jesus*, for he was by nature in the very form of God, yet he did not regard existence in equality with God as something to be snatched at, but he emptied himself, and took the very form of a slave, and became like men. And when he came in appearance as a man for all to recognise, he became obedient even to the extent of accepting death, even the death of a cross. And for that reason God exalted him, and granted to him the name which is above every name, in order that at the name of *Jesus* every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things upon the earth, and things below the earth, and that every tongue should confess that *Jesus Christ* is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

In many ways this is the greatest and most moving passage Paul ever wrote about *Jesus*. It states a favourite thought of his. The essence of it is in the simple statement Paul made to the Corinthians that, although *Jesus* was rich, yet for our sakes he

became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). Here that simple idea is stated with a fulness which is without parallel. Paul is pleading with the Philippians to live in harmony, to lay aside their discords, to shed their personal ambitions and their pride and their desire for prominence and prestige, and to have in their hearts that humble, selfless desire to serve, which was the essence of the life of Christ. His final and unanswerable appeal is to point to the example of Jesus Christ.

This is a passage which we must try fully to understand, because it has so much in it to awaken our minds to thought and our hearts to wonder. To this end we must look closely at some of its great Greek words.

Greek is a far richer language than English. Where English has one word to express an idea, Greek has often two or three or more. In one sense these words are synonyms, but they never mean entirely the same thing; they always have some special flavour. That is particularly so of this passage. Every word is chosen by Paul with meticulous care to show two things—the reality of the manhood and the reality of the godhead of Jesus Christ. Let us take the phrases one by one. We will set them down both in the Authorized Version and in our own translation, and then try to penetrate to the essential meaning behind them.

Verse 6: *Being in the form of God; he was by nature in the very form of God.* Two words are most carefully chosen to show the unchangeable godhead of Jesus Christ. The word which the Authorized Version translates *being* is from the Greek verb *huparchein* which is not the common Greek word for *being*. It describes that which a man is in his very essence and which cannot be changed. It describes that part of a man which, in any circumstances, remains the same. So Paul begins by saying that Jesus was essentially and unalterably God.

He goes on to say that Jesus was in the *form* of God. There are two Greek words for *form*, *morphē* and *schēma*. They must both be translated *form*, because there is no other English equivalent, but they do not mean the same thing. *Morphē* is the essential form which never alters; *schēma* is the outward form which changes from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance. For instance, the *morphē* of any human being is humanity and this never changes; but his *schēma* is continually changing. A baby, a child, a boy, a youth, a man of middle age, an old man always have the *morphē* of humanity, but the outward *schēma* changes all the time. Roses, daffodils, tulips, chrysanthemums, primroses, dahlias, lupins all have the one *morphē* of flowers; but their *schēma* is different. Aspirin, penicillin, cascara, magnesia all have the one *morphē* of drugs; but their *schēma* is different. The *morphē* never alters; the *schēma* continually does. The word Paul uses for Jesus being in the *form* of God is *morphē*; that is to say, his unchangeable being is divine. However his outward *schēma* might alter, he remained in essence divine.

Jesus *did not think it robbery to be equal with God; he did not regard existence in equality with God as something to be snatched at.* The word used for *robbery*, which we have translated *a thing to be snatched at*, is *harpagmos* which comes from a verb

meaning *to snatch*, or *to clutch*. The phrase can mean one of two things, both of which are at heart the same. (a) It can mean that Jesus did not need to snatch at equality with God, because he had it as a right. (b) It can mean that he did not clutch at equality with God, as if to hug it jealously to himself, but laid it willingly down for the sake of men. However we take this, it once again stresses the essential godhead of Jesus.

Verse 7: *He emptied himself; he made himself of no reputation*. The Greek is the verb *kenoun* which means literally *to empty*. It can be used of removing things from a container, until the container is empty; of pouring something out, until there is nothing left. Here Paul uses the most vivid possible word to make clear *the sacrifice of the Incarnation*. The glory of divinity Jesus gave up willingly in order to become man. He emptied himself of his deity to take upon himself his humanity. It is useless to ask how; we can only stand in awe at the sight of him, who is almighty God, hungry and weary and in tears. Here in the last reach of human language is the great saving truth that he who was rich for our sakes became poor.

He took upon him the form of a servant; he took the very form of a slave. The word used for *form* is *morphē*, which we have seen means the essential form. Paul means that when Jesus became man it was no play-acting but reality. He was not like the Greek gods, who sometimes, so the stories ran, became men but kept their divine privileges. Jesus truly became man. *But* there is something more here. *He was made in the likeness of men; he became like men*. The word which the Authorized Version translates *made* and which we have translated *became* is a part of the Greek verb *gignesthai*. This verb describes *a state which is not a permanent state*. The idea is that of *becoming*, and it describes a changing phase which is completely real but which passes. That is to say, the manhood of Jesus was not permanent; it was utterly real, but it passed.

Verse 8: *He was found in fashion as a man; he came in appearance as a man for all to recognise*. Paul makes the same point. The word the Authorized Version has translated *fashion* and which we have translated *appearance* is *schēma*, and we have seen that this indicates a form which alters.

Verses 6–8 form a very short passage; but there is no passage in the New Testament which so movingly sets out the utter reality of the godhead and the manhood of Jesus and makes so vivid the sacrifice that he made when he laid aside his godhead and took manhood upon him. How it happened, we cannot tell, but it is the mystery of a love so great that, although we can never fully understand it, we can blessedly experience it and adore it.

HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION

Philippians 2:5–11 (*continued*)

It is always to be remembered that when Paul thought and spoke about Jesus, his interest and his intention were never primarily intellectual and speculative; they were

always practical. To him theology and action were always bound together. Any system of thought must necessarily become a way of life. In many ways this passage is one of the greatest reaches of theological thought in the New Testament, but its aim was to persuade the Philippians to live a life in which disunity, discord, and personal ambition had no place.

So, then, Paul says of Jesus that he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of a cross. The great characteristics of Jesus's life were humility, obedience, and self-renunciation. He did not desire to dominate men but only to serve them; he did not desire his own way but only God's way; he did not desire to exalt himself but only to renounce all his glory for the sake of men. Again and again the New Testament is sure that only the man who humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14). If humility, obedience, and self-renunciation were the supreme characteristics of the life of Jesus, they must also be the hall-marks of the Christian. Selfishness, self-seeking and self-display destroy our likeness to Christ and our fellowship with each other.

But the self-renunciation of Jesus Christ brought him the greater glory. It made certain that some day, soon or late, every living creature in all the universe, in heaven, in earth and even in hell, would worship him. It is to be carefully noted whence that worship comes. *It comes from love.* Jesus won the hearts of men, not by blasting them with power, but by showing them a love they could not resist. At the sight of this person who laid his glory by for men and loved them to the extent of dying for them on a cross, men's hearts are melted and their resistance is broken down. When men worship Jesus Christ, they fall at his feet in wondering love. They do not say "I cannot resist a might like that," but, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all." Worship is founded, not on fear, but on love.

Further, Paul says that, as a consequence of his sacrificial love, God gave Jesus the name which is above every name. One of the common biblical ideas is the giving of a new name to mark a new stage in a man's life. Abram became Abraham when he received the promise to God (Genesis 17:5). Jacob became Israel when God entered into the new relationship with him (Genesis 32:28). The promise of the Risen Christ to both Pergamos and to Philadelphia is the promise of a new name (Revelation 2:17; 3:12).

What then is the new name given to Jesus Christ? We cannot be quite certain what exactly was in Paul's mind, but most likely the new name is *Lord*.

The great title by which Jesus came to be known in the early Church was *kurios*, *Lord*, which has an illuminating history. (i) It began by meaning *master* or *owner*. (ii) It became the official title of the Roman Emperors. (iii) It became the title of the heathen gods. (vi) It was the word by which the Hebrew *Jehovah* was translated in the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures. So, then, when Jesus was called *kurios*, *Lord*, it meant that he was the Master and the Owner of all life; he was the King of kings; he

was the Lord in a way in which the heathen gods and the dumb idols could never be; he was nothing less than divine.

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²*The letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. 2000, c1975 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. The Westminster Press: Philadelphia