



“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

I sometimes wonder what it means to be proud. Am I proud of who I am? Is that okay? And why? Did I have anything to do with it? What have I done to take pride in?

Upon pondering these things I find myself thinking that I'm proud to be a child of God, but I can't take credit for that. I can say I'm proud to be an American but the truth is I am blessed to be an American. I am proud of all those brave souls who were responsible for the creation of this country and our freedom, and for those brave souls who continue to defend it and preserve it, but I can't take credit for that either. I am glad that I was gifted with the wisdom to decide to follow Jesus, but that wisdom sure didn't come from me, although I am

proud I decided to accept it and follow it. That's okay, right?

I guess I have pretty much come to the conclusion that anything good that I have to be proud of comes from God, and I can only take credit for making the choice to follow and nurture those gifts, not fall into the false notion that their origin lies within my design, my creation, or my wisdom. In years past I did a pretty bang-up job of being proud of doing what I shouldn't do; you know-following the unwise choices arising out of Jim's un-wisdom. Thanks be to God I survived all that and hopefully learned from it.

Today, I am much more than proud-I am blessed! Blessed with the joy of knowing I am God's and am humbled by the enormity of what that means. It means I am loved beyond measure-loved unconditionally-loved despite anything I have done or could have done. I am humbled in the presence of that which is truly good-truly true, truly beautiful. I am humbled in the presence of that which I will always exalt-God-a presence that is always with me and always with you. A presence that awed those who were present during His Sermon on the Mount.

Brothers and sisters, we are more than proud-we are blessed to be God's-to be loved beyond measure-to be humbled in the presence of that which we know is beyond greatness and beyond what we could possibly understand, which is why it is so great, why it is God whom we can surely be proud to call-our Father our Mother-our shepherd, our faithful friend and undefeatable shield, strength, and salvation. We are proud to be able to say we are members of the Jesus movement here in Los Osos.

Looking back on my life, I don't ever remember aspiring to be a "Bigshot" or to be #1 or to be "on top" or to have everybody call me "sir," or move out of the way when I approached, or any of that sort of thing. I did think it would be nice to have enough money to live comfortably, though. But, I never relished the idea of making the money at the expense of exploiting others, although, that could be a foreseeable "side-effect." No, I think from the time I was a young man, I've known that I wanted to ultimately serve God. Unfortunately, I've become much better and more proficient at serving Jim. It's not an easy task to serve God because that means forsaking

that which comes naturally-serving Jim-what's in it for Jim, you know is Jim getting a fair shake in this deal?

Well, yes, Jim, and all of us here have gotten a more than fair shake in this deal-we have been saved by a God who loved us so much as to become one of us and showed us what it means to Love. He humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross out of an immeasurable love which caused Him to be exalted-exalted to the position of Lord of Lords and King of Kings, the Beloved, The Son of God. Echoing the words of His Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

So yeah, in order to be proud of being part of the Jesus movement here in Los Osos, we are called to walk the walk not just talk the talk, which means forsaking what comes naturally, ourselves, and going out there among what does not come naturally-serving those whose circumstances are less favorable than ours-those whom it is difficult for us to naturally be around, those whom God loves beyond measure, unconditionally, just like us. And, those whom God delights in our communication of that love through loving them.

The theme of this year's Diocesan Convention was "Identity." In her address to the convention, Bishop Mary reminded us that our "Identity" is centered in Jesus, the Christ, who provides us

the strength and grace to empower us to take that first unnatural step into love of the other. And, after that first step, we become, I believe, more and more empowered and engaged in being the hands and feet of Christ to those who are hungry for the same relationship with Him that we enjoy.

Dear people of St. Benedict's, we are the Family of God, the Body of Christ, and each one of us the Temple of the Holy Spirit which gives us all that we need to serve Christ by serving His sheep-out there. So let's exalt the Lord who is worthy of exaltation by humbling ourselves out of the natural tendency towards self-serving pride and into selfless prideful service of our neighbors and thereby Christ Himself.

Friends, in conclusion, I would say, Yes, it's okay to be proud-proud to be humble servants whom Jesus can be proud to call His disciples. The Kingdom of God has drawn near.

It's already in our hearts and we can be proud to say we paid that forward by serving that fruit to God's sheep-out there. "The greatest among you will be your servant." Let's be Christ's Grateful servants-We can surely be proud of that! "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Amen.