

In the name of God Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

There is a great icebreaker that I like to use when I'm getting to know other people in a group, and it is to swap stories of some of your most embarrassing moments. It's helpful because it breaks down those walls and facades of flawlessness that we often like to project to other people and get us laughing at ourselves. I was recently sharing some of my most embarrassing moments and was reminded of an event that occurred when I was a brand new baby priest serving a church in Ohio. I was newly ordained and it was my first time officiating at a wedding. I wanted to show everyone how perfectly I could lead a wedding service.

We were getting ready to begin the service when I realized that no one had lit the altar candles. Our high altar was atop several steep stairs, so I got up there, gracefully lit all six candles and turned around looking solemnly at the crowd with taper in hand and then completely missed the stairs, falling down all the steps, about as ridiculously as one could, tangling myself up in my alb with a loud crash. In that moment I had the crazy thought, "Maybe no one saw that" only to look up and see the videographer smiling and capturing the entire thing on his camera.

For years now I have imagined that couple showing their wedding video to friends and saying, "Wait, you have to watch the opening. This is great." Of course, they all laugh. So my embarrassing priestly moment was captured forever on film. I share this story with you today because I would like you to actually think of some of your most embarrassing moments, or, in fact, I'd like to challenge you even further, maybe even to recall times you've made a big mistake, or something you may find hard to admit to somebody. I'd like you to keep those memories, those stories in your mind this morning, and maybe even dare to share them with each other later.

There is a song out right now called "Broken" by Lovely the Band and the chorus is really catchy. It goes, "I like that you're broken; broken like me. Maybe that makes me a fool." During a radio interview, I heard the lead singer of the song say that the song was really important to the band as a reminder that we're all broken in some way. But he said, "We often forget it. We often hide it, because in our world of social media," he said, "We only play the highlights reel." It requires honesty. It requires humility to admit who we are and what we've done. It's often our pride, our ego that prevents us from admitting, not only to others, but even

to ourselves our broken places, our mistakes, our downright failures.

But as Christians, we follow a Lord and a teacher who embrace a path of humility, who is humbled at every single turn for our sakes. Our Collect for this day of Palm Sunday reminds us of this when it says, "Almighty and ever Living God, in your tender love for the human race, you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, who takes upon Him our nature and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of His great humility."

Our reading in Philippians continues to echo it, inviting us, saying, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." In that passion narrative that we just read in Mark's gospel, Jesus is interrogated by Pilate and taunted mercilessly by the crowds while he's nailed to the cross, and yet not once does he seek to defend himself. So to all onlookers, he appears a total failure. He's not a success, not a hero, not triumphant in any sense.

Humility was embraced by Jesus at every turn. The incarnation itself was a humbling of incredible proportions. Jesus begins his life in the most humble of circumstances, born into a desperately poor family, born in the barn with animals. Jesus then lives out his earthly ministry, wandering and homeless. Jesus ends his earthly ministry by being put to death on a cross, an instrument that was intended by the Romans to humiliate and torture their most common and despised criminals. These bookends of Jesus' life on earth were about as humble as we could imagine.

But then there is this one moment, it's the one and only moment we read of when Jesus is publicly praised and it happens on Palm Sunday during Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. But even then, Jesus chooses to ride into the city, not on a horse, not on a stallion like a proud warrior king, but on the donkey, the animal that symbolized then and now, humility, demonstrating even then that his mission was based in humble service and sacrifice. His life of humility is the life of the one we claim to follow. So Jesus shows us what it looks like to put our egos aside for God's service.

But think with me for a moment how radically counter-cultural that is. We live in a world where ego is king and showing ourselves to be a success, always right, without flaw, bigger and better and tougher than the next guy. That is the idol worthy of worship in our society. The continual boosting of our pride and ego is a constant

temptation today, but embracing that path, that path of pride and ego totally prevents us from finding the real treasures of life. It prevents us from being honest about ourselves. It prevents us from having intimate relationships with other people and with God. Without honest humility, we can't be a blessing to others. You need to see and know that we, too, are broken; that we are human beings in need of God's grace, God's help, which is freely given to us in Christ.

Samuel Moor Shoemaker was describing a sense of resentment and unforgiveness he held against a group of men who opposed his work. He wrote this. He said, "Years ago I read a quotation from Mary Lyon that recurs to me again and again: 'Nine-tenths of our suffering is caused by others not thinking so much of us as we think they ought.'" I'm going to say that one again: "Nine-tenths of our suffering is caused by others not thinking so much of us as we think they ought." He says, "If you want to know where pride nestles and festers in most of us, that is right where it is, and it is not the opposition of others, but our own pride, which causes the deepest hurt." He said, "I never read a word that penetrated more deeply into the sin of pride, which all of us suffer, nor one which opens up more surgically our places of unforgiveness."

One of those central lessons of Palm Sunday of Christ's crucifixion, which we focus on particularly today and into this Holy Week into Good Friday, is that we are called to embrace the humble path, to embrace humility, to let go of the constant need for approval from others that our egos relentlessly cry out for. We let it go for the sake of our love for God and others. So, my friends, we must be honest and true about who we are, what we've done, how we failed, that we're human, we have all fallen short.

The church has to be a refuge where people can be themselves, where we can be ourselves, broken pieces and all. Where it's not only okay to admit our feelings and brokenness, but to embrace that sharing, because humility is the path of Jesus, and for his followers, and this is the irony, it is the way to healing, to forgiveness, grace and love.

Amen.