

## Christ Jesus “Emptied” Himself (Palm Sunday, Year A)

### Philippians 2:5-10—Christ Jesus Emptied Himself

<sup>5</sup> Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> . . . though he was in *the form of God*, did not count *equality with God* a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but *emptied himself*, taking *the form of a servant*, being born in *the likeness of men*.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in *human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross*.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has *highly exalted him* and bestowed on him *the name which is above every name*,

<sup>10</sup> that *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow*, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of *God the Father*. (Philippians 2:5-10)

#### 1. Preexistence:

- a. Divinity: “form of God” (Greek *morphē theou*) (Phil 2:6)
- b. Equality with God: “equality with God” (Greek *isa theou*)

#### 2. Birth:

- a. Divine Form: he “emptied himself” (Greek *ekeinōsen*) (cf. 1 Cor 1:17)
- b. Humanity: he takes the “form of a slave” (Greek *morphēn doulou*)
- c. Appearance: “form” (Greek *schēma*) of “man” (Greek *anthrōpos*) (2:8)

#### 3. Passion and Death:

- a. Humiliation: he “lowers” himself (Greek *tapeinoō*) (2:8)
- b. Obedience: he became “obedient unto death” (2:8)
- c. Cross: “even death on a cross”

Cicero: the “extreme and ultimate penalty *for a slave*” (*In Verrum* 2.5.169)

Valerius Maximus: “the slave’s punishment” (2.7.12)

#### 4. Resurrection and Ascension:

- a. Exaltation: “therefore God [the Father] highly exalted him [Christ]”
- b. The Name: Jesus (Hebrew, “The LORD Saves”)
- c. Lord: (Hebrew YHWH; Greek *kyrios*)

### The Living Tradition

Augustine: Christ, therefore, our Lord and Saviour, true Son of God in His divinity, and true son of man according to the flesh. . . thought it not robbery to be equal to God, was He born of a woman, but in the form of a servant, in taking which He emptied Himself.

*He is therefore said to have emptied Himself because He took the form of a servant, not because He lost the form of God. For in the unchangeable possession of that nature by which in the form of God He is equal to the Father, He took our changeable nature, by which He might be born of a virgin. (Augustine, Reply to Faustus 3.6; in NPNF1 4.161)*

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (Palm Sunday, Year A)

1. What does Paul mean when he says that Christ Jesus “emptied himself” in the incarnation? Does Jesus ‘lose’ his divinity when he assumes our humanity?

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2. What two virtues did Jesus exhibit in his willingness to become human and go to death on a Cross?

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### For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. Dennis Hamm, S.J., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013).