

HUMBLE BRAG

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! Gal 6:14-18

In today's reading, the Apostle Paul's authority is again being challenged, and Paul again shows us the Christian way to deal with such challenges. Don't react, don't tear others down, don't puff yourself up. As he puts it; "may I never boast of anything except the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Boasting is one of those things that we all do, but is so close to us we have a hard time seeing it and the damage it can do. But it's easy to see in others. The other day a neighborhood boy came by bragging about what a great swimmer he was. We went to his house to see, and found that the poor kid was scared of the water and couldn't swim at all. Kids are very transparent, so we can learn much from them. This boy was feeling insecure, afraid and ashamed, that he didn't measure up, so he boasted to get approval from others that he couldn't give himself. We adults do this all the time, we are just more sophisticated in hiding it. There is even now a new way to hide bragging called the humble brag, and you can find it everywhere on social media. "Ugggggh I just ate about fifteen piece of chocolate-gotta learn to control myself when flying first class or they'll cancel my modelling contract." Rather than just directly brag about being a model and flying first class, let's hide it a bit behind a little self-criticism so it doesn't seem like bragging. But it is bragging, and we all do it in some ways; making it look like our kids are perfect, that we know it all, that we have it all together. The problem is this; that the more we mask and puff up who we are, the less connected we become to those around us and even God, because love and connection takes authenticity and vulnerability.

So how do we try and stop the problem of boasting and bragging? Well the psychologist deals with boasting by trying to raise our self-esteem, because if we are secure in ourselves, we won't need to brag. They will try to turn up the voices in our heads that say you are strong enough and good enough, and turn down the voices of self-judgement...These techniques can be helpful. But we Christians believe that the problem of bragging and our underlying insecurity, goes much deeper than our minds; it is rooted in our very souls. We Christians believe that each of us has two sides of ourselves that are constantly in tension. There is our false self, our egos, and then there is our true self, the deepest part of who we are and who God created us to be.

For this reason, Paul reminds us in today's epistle reading that the only truly humble brag-is to boast in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ. That's because the cross is our daily reminder that your false self, my false self, must constantly be crucified, sacrificed to achieve new life. It will never be satisfied, no matter how much we might try to appease it. It will go on bragging, comparing, judging and condemning because that is its nature. This I think is the meaning behind one of Jesus' seemingly harshest statements. "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (Jn 12:25) This isn't about hating life itself which is a gift from God, it is about hating our false self and ego, putting it in its place. Because if we can daily sacrifice this false self, Paul joyously reminds us that a new self will be offered in its place, a new creation which is everything.

That's why Jesus, unlike the founder of any other religion, does not encourage any form of sacrifice, except the sacrifice of the ego, the false self. "The sacrifice pleasing to God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart." His cross is the mysterious means of healing for all of mankind because it shows us not to hide, deny or run away from our own insecurity and brokenness. Where we are terrified by our own weakness and mortality, the cross steadies us. When we say to ourselves; "If I don't boast and hide what is lacking in me, they won't love me," the cross shows us that we are loved especially in our vulnerability. Where the world shuns the weak and vulnerable in society, the cross shows us that God uses the door of vulnerability to enter the world. God is vulnerable because God is love. Anyone who has decided to love knows that to love means to become vulnerable. In Jesus, we understand that God is the most vulnerable of us all.

And so let us join in Paul's truly humble brag, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything," now and always; amen.