



I had the privilege of going on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1999. One of the places we visited, of course, was Bethlehem. There's a huge basilica there that marks the spot where Jesus laid in the manger. You can even go down under the main altar and touch the spot and say a prayer. But the curious thing about this basilica is that there is only one doorway to get in and that one doorway is only about four feet tall. Children, of course, can go right through. Most adults have to bend down to pass through. Legend has it that it was purposely built this way to remind all who come that it is only by bending low, only by humbling oneself, only by becoming like a child, can one come into the presence of the Holy Child of Bethlehem.

Humility is the doorway that brings us into the presence of God. There is no other doorway but this one. In fact, only through humility can we even recognize Jesus. Certainly, anyone can know **about** Jesus, but only the humble can **know** Jesus.

In the Christmas story, who are the ones that recognize Jesus as the Son of God come down from heaven? Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, the Wise Men. These are the humble ones.

And who are the ones who do not recognize Jesus? King Herod, the elite of society, the scholars of the time. These are the proud ones. God cannot be seen by the proud, only by the humble.

So what is this humility that allows us to see God? Let's look again at the humble ones in the Christmas story.

Mary – When Mary, already pregnant with the Lord Jesus, went to visit Elizabeth, Elizabeth praised her, “How is it that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?” Mary, in turn, gave **God** the glory for the goodness that she had: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the **Lord**. My spirit rejoices in **God, my Savior**.”

Also, when the angel Gabriel came to her announcing that she would be with child by the power of the Holy Spirit, she completely submitted to God's plan. She put her entire destiny into His hands. “I am the handmade of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word.”

Then there is St. Joseph. He discovers that his betrothed is with child. He knows that it is not his, and when the angel Gabriel comes to him in a dream and tells

him that the child was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, even though he may not have fully understood God's plan, He submitted in trust to what God was asking of him.

Also, there are the Magi. The Magi are learned men, scholars. It is not learning that's the problem; it's the haughtiness and arrogance that can come sometimes with being highly educated. Rather, the Magi used their learning to accomplish God's purpose.

Finally, there are the shepherds. They are poor, simple, dependent on God to take care of them. Humility and simplicity go hand-in-hand. Their lives were uncomplicated. They were children in the Father's hand, and that is why the angels came to them first to announce the Savior's birth.

The humble are obedient, simple, trusting in God's providence, dependent on God, glorifying God for His goodness. In a word, they are children in the Father's hands. These are the one's to whom God shows Himself.

On the other hand, the proud are arrogant, conniving, haughty, self pleasuring, living life and even their practice of religion, on their own terms. These are the ones to whom God simply cannot come. Pride blinds them from God's presence. The proud are usually bored with life, restless, because pride seeks to suck self-satisfaction out of every material thing. The proud hop from one thing to another in life trying to find happiness, trying to find peace. But, after exhausting the pleasure out of one thing, or one person, they move on to the next. Life is a burden for them. Life, for them, is boring.

The humble, on the other hand, are able to see God in everything. They see God in their spouse. They see God in their children. They see God in their co-workers. They see God in the poor. They hear God when the scriptures are proclaimed. They see Him especially present in this Holy Eucharist on this altar. They see Him in the stars and the trees and the wind and in all of creation. They recognize Him especially today as a tiny baby, born in a manger, born to be close to us and they give their lives to Him.

For the humble, life is a great joy, because the humble are able to see God wherever He is, and He is everywhere.

After Our Lady and St. Joseph, St. Francis was probably the most humble man who ever lived. It is appropriate to mention him on Christmas because he was the first to construct a manger. St. Francis saw God everywhere and in all things because he was humble, and because of that he was full of joy in all things.

He was full of joy when He was cold and wet because he saw in the chill the cleansing breath of God, and he saw in the rain the nourishment which comes from God's loving hands bringing forth life from the earth.

When he was starving and gave his last morsel of bread to a poor man, He was full of joy because God had allowed him to share in His charity, which is the very life of God Himself.

He was full of joy when the sun was warm on his face and the breeze blew softly on his skin because God has given us so many good things.

And he was full of joy, overflowing joy, to see God lying in a manger, one of us, close to us, loving us in such an intimate way.

Only the humble can see God in all things and only the humble can see God in the little child lying in a manger.

Finally, I want to add something.

Sometimes priests use the Christmas homily to lay a guilt trip on those who have not been coming to Mass all year. I don't want to do that, but I do want to say something to those who may have been away from coming to Mass every Sunday:

We want you here.

God needs you here.

We need you here at St. Anthony's, and I am glad that you are here today.

We need your gifts and talents for this parish. Above all, we need you in joining the sacrifice of your life to Jesus' perfect sacrifice in the Holy Eucharist.

I'm glad that you are here today, and I hope that you make a good confession and join with us every Sunday as we give our lives together to God in this Holy Eucharist.

My friends, it is only the humble who can truly see God, and only the humble who can truly know God. May God make all of us humble so that we can see him especially today in the Holy Child of Bethlehem.

**Fr. Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend, Indiana
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