

**November 5, 2017 The Humbling Of A Bishop Homily:** Bishop Fulton J. Sheen was once the most recognizable religious figure in the world. He was a gifted preacher, noted scholar and the author of many books that reflect his profound learning and deep Catholic faith. In the 1950's he hosted a popular television program and always appeared in expensive clerical attire. At receptions he would be given the place of honor, befitting his status as a Prince of the Church. The faithful addressed him as "Your Excellency", and kissed his Episcopal ring. Vanity sometimes got the best of him! A turning point in his life was when he traveled to Rome to participate at the Second Vatican Council in 1962 in which all the bishops of the world had gathered for prayer and study. By his own admission he was humbled and brought low by the presence of Catholic bishops who were persecuted and beaten for their faith and suffered imprisonment and those bishops from the poorest regions of the world who labored alongside Christians who were destitute and were without hope for a brighter future.

His encounter with extraordinary men of faith was a life changing moment of grace.

If you should ever be humbled, made to feel small or "cut down to size", rejoice and be glad: salvation has come to your house.

The setting of today's gospel (Mt.23:1-12) is a courtyard in the temple of Jerusalem. Jesus is moving closer toward his saving passion and death. He directs his rather harsh remarks at the temple officials, the Scribes and the Pharisees, who are guilty of making religious leadership more of a show than an act of service. They sought honors from the people rather than the approbation of God. "All their works are performed to be seen". (Mt.23:5) In criticizing them, he has taught his disciples how not to exercise authority.

The words of Jesus sum up beautifully the whole revelation of the Christian God. "He who humbles himself shall be exalted. (Mt.23:12) Paradoxically, for the Christian, the only way up is down. In the person of Christ, the highest becomes the lowest out of love. God's omnipotence is manifested in his loving service to others.

If you should ever take a tour of former president Franklin Delano Roosevelt's summer home in Hyde Park in downstate New York, you will be shown the servant's quarters, a large part of the house, where the chambermaids, butlers and the chauffeur resided. It is instructive to note that for much of human history, people had little choice except to be in the service of the more powerful.

Servants appear frequently in the parables of Jesus. In today's gospel, Jesus teaches that "the greatest among you must be your servant". (Mt.23:11) And there was no more faithful servant than Christ Himself! In a dramatic gesture, he sets aside his outer garment and puts on an apron. He undertakes the lowest of a servant's task. He washes the feet of his disciples. On Good Friday, he will fulfill what the prophet Isaiah foretold: He will offer the ultimate act of service by his death on the cross.

In St. Paul's letter to the Christian community of Philippi, he quotes a hymn of ancient origin in which he refers memorably to Christ. "He empties himself and took the form of a slave". (Phil2:7a) In his encounters with authentic witnesses of the faith, true servants, Bishop Sheen learned an invaluable lesson about the need for humility and the indispensable role of service in his apostolic ministry.

Amen!