

**"No Weak Geek"**  
Homily of July 5, 2005  
by Father Michael Dibble

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Years ago, there used to be a comedienne, a woman, on television and one of the characters whom Lily Tomlin portrayed was a little girl, Edith Anne. Edith Anne would be sitting in this big rocking chair and she would be telling you some incident that happened to her, the little girl, and she would always end up at the conclusion of her narrative by saying, "And that's the truth! .... And that's the truth!"

Our Lord today is sharing with us several startling truths .... truth, truth. Maybe it is just a coincidence but for six years I have been lucky enough to be here on Sunday, it seems that this gospel about "Learn of me..." Our Lord says, "Learn of me. I am meek and humble of heart.") always seems to be my turn to give that particular gospel. So I have to repeat the phrase that I have been using all those years about truth, "Humilitas est veritas." (St. Thomas) Humility is truth. That's all. Humility is truth.

So I grab my six Bible scholars, Catholic, first-rate Bible scholars who knew Aramaic and Greek. What does Our Lord mean? What's he talking about, "meek and humble of heart?" And he knows the Father and the Father knows him like nobody knows anybody else. He is the Father's son. "Humilitas est veritas." Truth. What are some of the truths?

First of all, let me see, 1, 2, 3, 4. Four. "Learn of me. I am meek and humble of heart." Now, meek does not mean a weak geek! It doesn't mean a doormat, a dope, a dupe, or a dishrag. It doesn't. The translation is not. In American ears, "meek" means, or can mean, a weak kind of a geek. These are the scholars, Aramaic and Greek. What Our Lord is saying is "Learn my style of bringing God's message to people." Gently. Meek. Humbly. Not the way some of the Scribes and the Pharisees (The big shots, ecclesiastical big shots!) had been teaching the Jewish people for so long. Over six hundred tiny laws, and if you break one of them, you are in ecclesiastical, political and social trouble. Over six hundred of them! For example, if you had to wash a garment seven times. If you were going through an alleyway and a hooker passed you in the alleyway, if any of her garments touched your garment you had to go home and clean them. You had to clean the garment! Six-hundred laws like that!! And Our Lord comes along, talking about the style of delivering his Father's message gently. If I can evoke a cliché, which is sublime, "Easy does it." Our Lord has come to give us basic truth. Our Lord says his Father loves us, full of mercy, can't wait to forgive us.... That's Christ's version. I prefer that version. It's not that, it's atheism. Personal opinion, just.... Christ's version, and "I know the Father as nobody else does." Learn my style.... He is saying it to his friends. When you are spreading the word, gently, easy does it. Not, "If you don't.... six hundred of these, and if you break one...."

Father Raymond Brown, who is our best Bible scholar in America, when I took a class with him, said, "This gospel is a thunderbolt!" Not to us. We have heard it since we were kids. Meek and humble of heart... It's a thunderbolt to the listeners. First of all, Our Lord calls the Father, "Abba," which means "Papa." The audience listening to Christ must have gasped, really, calling Him "Papa?" We don't even write his name fully. We write the vowels. Six hundred tiny laws. If you break one of them, you are in big trouble. I'm speaking for the first time. I am revealing to you, the "little ones." He doesn't mean "kids." He means open, don't be scared any more. That's basically what he means, not a weak geek. Easy does it. Maybe you don't like that cliché but that's what the scholars say it means.

The second truth: This Jesus, and I had to keep emphasizing that when I was teaching kids in college, meek and humble. It rings so uneuphoniously on an American ear. This is the same Jesus who took on the establishment. That's another cliché, but you know what I mean. Some people once brought Our Lord a message from I

Herod. Our Lord turned to the messenger and said, "You tell that fox what I have just said." He calls Kir Herod a fox in the public forum. Now "fox" meant a sly predator to a Jewish ear. Remember that Bible I "...catches the foxes, the little foxes that come and tear our vines, our vines of tender grapes." He's calling King a fox, sly predator of the poor. Our Lord, this carpenter!

On another occasion, he takes on the Ecclesiastical establishment, not all of them, but many of the Scribes and Pharisees who taught this way. Our Lord says, "You know what you remind me of? Whited sepulchres." (white-washed tombs!) "And inside you are full of rotting bones." Doesn't sound like a weak meek to me. He was always gentle with you and me, the sinners, penitent, listening. But the establishment of a threat and danger over a mountain of minutiae laws, he was tough on.

And I know you all remember that passage where Our Lord drives the money changers out of the temple. You don't think he brought welts on their backs. That wasn't Our Lord's style. But I bet he booted their derrieres. And in the Greek, Our Lord, explained to me by this scripture scholar in Stanford, when he drives them out, he says "You turned my Father's house into a marketplace," he is panting with anger. That's the verb they use. He is so angry, not like a weak geek to me.

He gives us advice in one of the gospels. When it comes from the lips of Jesus I know you know we have to hear it. Our Lord says to us, as he did to his first apostles, "I want you to be as gentle as a dove and as cunning as a snake." Now, the "gentle as a dove," after two thousand years of Christianity, we have barely absorbed that. I say "we," not "you." We have barely absorbed that truth. But he adds "and be as smart as a serpent." You use your brains. Your brain can handle a lot of problems that sheer violence can't. "Cunning as a snake, gentle as a dove." And that's the truth! No more terror. Evidently, according to the solid Catholic Bible scholars, the message about "meek and humble." This is the style I want you to use. I got this from my Father. "The Father and I are one.... Papa."

Can I give just one example about terror versus easy, about Holy Communion, the Eucharist? Now there will be some here at Mass who are approximately as old as I, (There MUST be some!) and who may, as I did awhile ago, regard the recent attitude to receiving the Eucharist, just a little casual, a little cavalier, a little too well. Well, in 1960, it was quite the opposite, about our contact with Holy Communion. I was just a kid and the kindest priest in the parish, Father Smith.... I was an altar boy and it was at the end of Mass and I was bringing the things in, and he said, "Michael! Don't touch that!" It was the chalice, from which the wine is imbibed. He said, "That hasn't been purified yet." That is the training with which I was brought up. It was all right, but it was more of the.... Anyhow, as a young priest, this month, July 1960 (I know this because I keep a diary which is getting as big as the Congressional Record.) I was young and scared. I was a weak geek, a green new priest. There was a lady who met me on the main street. I had just arrived, my first weekend. And she came down the street. She said, "Why did you have to come? We loved the priest before you." From that point on, I call her inside, "La Femme Formidable." And she would sit over there on Sunday, like this. Oh, i-c-y stares! She terrified me. And I found out she was a pillar of the parish, i.e., a big contributor! And there she would sit, disliking me intensely. OK. So, it comes time for Holy Communion. This is 1960, before the new approach to how we handled Holy Communion. In those days, you all knelt at a communion rail which was locked and you went from person to person and you administered Holy Communion. Well, it was boiling hot and I was perspiring, and some of the perspiration coming from my pate landed in my eyes. And as I was giving La Femme Formidable Holy Communion, I dropped it on her bosom. And, although it was a very humid day, she had a kind of little bed of lace, and it fell from the lace onto the floor. I couldn't go clambering over the communion rail. So I leaned over and I said, tremulously to the woman, "Would you please hand me Holy Communion?" She said, "Certainly NOT! I'm not permitted to touch it!" And she was right. That's how I was trained. But Billy Hearst was kneeling right next to her. Billy Hearst had just made his First Communion a couple of months before. Billy Hearst was a very solemn little boy. He's all grown up, and has grandkids now. He was a very solemn little boy, but he got my panic and he got up from where he was kneeling.

and he picked up the Eucharist. And he said to me, very quietly, "Here he is." Now, the woman brought had been brought up was afraid, really terrified, "I can't touch IT!" The little boy, "Here HE is." Now, th three months of seminary study on the Incarnation, the Transubstantiation, and the Aristotelian scholastic explanation of matter and form in the Eucharist. In three words! In today's gospel, Our Lord says, "Some things, Father, you have hidden from the learned ones and you have revealed to the little ones." He wasn't terrified. He was enormously respectful, but he had all the theology down and he was very "easy does it. more terror!

And finally, humility can work, even in the real world. It can. *Humilitas est veritas*. Just the truth. By the just got a brand new book in the mail, a brand new history of the Catholic Church. It is great reading, sol scholarship. But, I mean, what a cast of characters we have had in two thousand years! Some of the most colossal losers, some of the most dynamic brains and saints. The History of the Church, and so I flipped something I remembered from my college days about Leo, Leo the Great, fifth century Pope. He was onl four feet tall, and Atilla the Hun was descending on Rome to rape and wrack and sack and loot. Leo, wh called "Little Leo" behind his back, a small pope, went to the gates of Rome, (Now this is valid history.) himself. He couldn't get anybody to go with him because here is Atilla and Hagar the Horrible en masse descending on Rome to level it, and Leo appeared at the gate. He said to Atilla, in Latin, which Atilla go "Don't. Don't. Please don't. Don't destroy this See of the Church. Don't destroy Rome." .... "Uh-h-h, OI did. Atilla backed away, and all the Hagar the Horribles followed, left it alone.

We had a nun in that Catholic High School, of which you are sick of hearing, and one day this nun had to substitute for one of the brothers who was sick, one of the brothers on the boys' side of the school. So, th headed to the homeroom and the senior guys were in there sending winged projectiles, paper airplanes and blackboard erasers, whizzing through the classroom. This nun was known throughout the school as "Vir; Most Powerful." She never hit a kid. But all she had to do, and she wasn't much bigger than little Leo, sl walked into the homeroom.... instant decorum. *Humilitas est veritas*. Be you as gentle as a dove and sma snake. It can work. It will take us a long time but it's from the lips of Jesus. ....And that's the truth!