

It is especially during Lent that we consider the humility of our Lord:  
That Christ humbled himself and became obedient unto death,  
Even death on a cross.

And in tonight's reading we have Jesus,  
On the night when he was betrayed,  
Not only teaching his students to live in humility,  
But also acting in humility himself.

Listen again to the last part of the reading: **A dispute also arose among [the disciples] as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But [Jesus] said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.**

Jesus has been celebrating the Passover with his disciples,  
And he has just instituted the Lord's Supper,  
Where he has served them with the bread which was his body,  
And with the cup that was his blood.

But his disciples did still not know the depths of his humility,  
Or the meaning of the suffering and death toward which he was headed.  
And they argue.

The argue among themselves about who is to be considered the greatest.

We don't know the details of the dispute,  
But from other places in the Gospel,  
And from Jesus' teaching,  
I wonder whether the argument was about the seating arrangements:  
About who, at this Passover meal,  
When Jesus has been welcomed in triumph to Jerusalem,  
When he has bested the chief priests and the elders  
The Sadducees and the Pharisees in argument,  
When has withdrawn to be alone with his disciples,  
I wonder whether the argument was about who should sit where...  
Who should be at Jesus' right hand, who at his left...  
Who should be at the centre of the action, who at the periphery.  
That'd be a very human argument,  
And one perhaps not so far in principle from each one of us here:

The sort of argument that we could imagine getting involved in.

We'll come back to Jesus' response to their argument,  
But let's first of all remember that this is not the first time  
That the disciples have had such an argument.

Earlier in the Gospel we read these words: **While everyone was amazed at all that [Jesus] was doing, he said to his disciples, 'Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.' But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying. An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.'** Luke 9:43b-48

So: in direct response to Jesus' foretelling of his suffering and death,  
The disciples argue among themselves about who is the greatest.  
Again, we don't know the details of the argument,  
But we do know that the Transfiguration has just happened,  
And that only Peter, John, and James were taken up the mountain  
To pray with Jesus.

So it's not too difficult to imagine the things that could have been brought up.

But Jesus responds to his disciples' argument,  
By teaching them that the least among them is the greatest,  
And he does this by welcoming a child:  
By welcoming the one who has nothing to offer, but can only receive.

At the heart of Christian discipleship is the reality  
That in the kingdom of God we are all children:  
We are all in the position of having nothing to offer God,  
We can only receive, or refuse to receive,  
What he gives in his Fatherly goodness.

In the Christian church we also only truly serve,  
We only exercise true greatness,  
When we hand on faithfully what we have received:  
When we hand of the commands of Jesus that we have received,

When we hand on the promises of Jesus that we have received,  
And when we do this in the callings that God has given us.

Jesus builds on his teaching of the disciples as the Gospel proceeds.

So about halfway through Luke's Gospel

Jesus gives us these words of encouragement: **'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.** Luke 12:35-38

When we are found by our Lord going about the callings that God has given us,  
When we are found by him handing on what we have received,  
Then, he says, he will fasten his belt and have us sit down to eat,  
And he will come and serve us.

As Christian people we think especially of our Lord serving us at his table,  
Where we eat and drink his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins,  
Where we receive for our Lord, and are strengthened to serve.

And this takes us back to Jesus' response to his arguing servants.

He had just been serving them at the table:

Instituting the Lord's supper on the night when he was betrayed.

And in response to his disciples' argument about greatness

He does not give up in exasperation, but he teaches:

He teaches that lording it over others

Is something that comes naturally to those who have power,

But who are outside of the kingdom of God.

But, he says, it is not so among us: this is not how God has ordered his church.

Instead, real authority is exercised when we don't push ourselves forward,

But when we are invited forward by God,

And when we take our positions of authority,

In the home, or in the workplace, in government, or in the church,

Understanding that we are there to serve just as our Lord does.

So let us on our Lenten journey receive the service of our Lord

So that we may serve as he calls us,

So that we may follow him on the path of the cross to the resurrected life.