

Rorate Coeli
20 December, Anno Domini 2020
St. John 1:19-28
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

At the heart of all sin lies pride, the desire to elevate ourself, our abilities, and our wisdom above God and our neighbor. Pride led Adam and Eve to ignore God's warning. Pride caused Cain's face to fall in hatred against his brother Abel. Pride is highly marketable - you are special and so you deserve to have this nice car, these nice clothes, this nice house. You are special so no one should be able to demand anything of you and you shouldn't have to make any sacrifices or suffer any discomfort. Pride turns spouses and children into annoying inconveniences to be stepped on and over and neighbors into enemies. Pride wants to be God, to be king of all and servant of none. Pride convinces you that your sin isn't sin and that anyone who tells you otherwise is judgmental. Pride scoffs at mercy and has no use for the idea of being saved. It deludes itself into thinking it is something noteworthy when it is nothing. Pride is the greatest weakness that afflicts all people and makes us enemies of God.

Pride always seeks opportunity for self-promotion. Pride would have leapt at the opportunity presented to John the Baptist to adorn himself with exalted titles and the accolades of the religious who's who of the day. John wouldn't have been lying if he had said "Yes, I am a prophet and the Elijah who is to come." But he sought no glory or self-promotion, which is what the priests and Levites were actually seeking. They were trying to figure out if they needed to cozy up to John in order to heighten their own status. John sought only to point them to Jesus, the one whom they didn't know and the one who so exceeded him in glory that he wasn't even worthy to untie his sandals. John knew that saying "yes" would have driven his questioners even further away from their Savior and deeper into the arms of the devil.

Pride is deadly. Pride is idolatry - the worship of yourself, your plans, your goals, your ideas, your hardship, and your desires. Repent. You are not special. You are of no more or less value to God than your neighbor. You are not better or more moral or smarter. The cross appointed to you by your Father this hour doesn't make you better or worse than anyone else. God doesn't need you to be special and He hates those who seek to exalt themselves in His eyes.

There is only one who is to be exalted, one who can lay any real claim to anything - Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through whom all things were made in heaven and on earth and the one who, unlike you, didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped but willingly humbled Himself. He who sits on the throne of heaven, He before whom even the holy angels bow and cover their faces, became a servant to those who hated Him by saving us from the eternal punishment we deserved. The spotless Lamb of God endured crucifixion and the full wrath of God His Father in order to pull out of death and condemnation us who tirelessly seek the praise and glory and honor that rightly belong only to Him. To Him alone belongs every last drop of glory and honor, praise and worship. That leaves exactly none for you.

Thus to be saved we must be humbled. We must be brought down from our lofty mountains of arrogance and imagined superiority and made beggars. We must be shown what we truly are - rebellious creatures who have condemned ourselves by our pride and idolatry. This is the work of the Law - to reveal the prideful thoughts of your heart so that you can no longer claim greatness or even goodness for yourself. You have exactly zero ability to save yourself from God's righteous judgment against you because there is nothing good in you, that is, in your flesh. It is rotten and evil to the core. Every inclination of your sinful heart is evil. All you have to do is listen to the Ten Commandments and you will see that to be the truth. Don't resist it. Don't feel the need to try to deny it or justify it. God won't be fooled by it. You aren't the Christ for yourself or for anyone else.

Again, consider the John the Baptist. It wouldn't be hard to argue that he was special. But then, again, as we saw last week, he wasn't. And now we hear it from his own mouth - "I am not the Christ." Though he had been appointed to the holy office of forerunner, John understood clearly that that wasn't to glorify him personally. That was to God's glory. God had appointed him to prepare the way of the Christ, not be the Christ. And by God's grace, John stuck to the plan. He was very clear about who he was and who he was not. He was definitely not the Christ. But he did know who the true Christ was and nothing mattered more to John than making sure everyone clearly knew that Jesus of Nazareth, Mary's son, IS the Christ.

Listen to John. Let him show you who the true Christ is. Behold the Lamb of God that takes away all your sin by bearing it in His own flesh on the cross. Behold the Lamb of God who gives you that same flesh from the altar as true food to save you. Listen the forerunners Christ sends to continue to point sinners to the true Christ. Don't allow your pride to turn you away from the Christ as it turned the

priests and Levites, scribes and Pharisees and countless others who thought so highly of themselves, who trusted in their own self-made righteousness unto their eternal destruction.

You are not the Christ. You are a sinner. But there is a Christ who has come for the sole purpose of saving sinners. He comes veiled in humility and weakness. Though He is Almighty God who creates and sustains the universe by His power, that is not how He comes among us. That would destroy us. He is not a God who is interested in impressing us or being impressed by us with shows of stoic disinterest, or the cold-hearted, self-serving pursuit of human improvement. In truth, nothing could be more insulting to our Lord than for us to stand before our Savior trying to convince Him that we didn't really need Him to do that. Only those who humble themselves before God, who allow the Law to expose the wickedness of their thoughts and their deeds, who confess before God that they are nothing and have nothing can see Jesus and rejoice that He is the Savior sent by God. That is why Jesus' humble birth to a humble mother brings us great joy because it is proof that the Lord had come for the likes of us sinners, that He wouldn't despise us poor wretches. It is proof of God's love for us, proof that He would draw near to us in our guilt and our death, in our weakness and nothingness, and bring us hope and life.

John is not the Christ. You are not the Christ. But among you, here in your very midst, in this very place, in these very words, stands the one who is, Jesus Christ, whose voice you hear, whose very Body and Blood is the true manna from heaven in this wilderness given to keep you and sustain you on your journey to the Promised Land. It is He who forgives all your sins. It is He who speaks the Word of the Father so that you can not only know the Father in truth, but even be one with the Father by the Holy Spirit. Listen to Him. Do not despise Him because He doesn't come with shows of great power or because He doesn't make you feel better about yourself or because He doesn't magically fix all your problems. Don't despise Him because He doesn't bring with Him success or ease or even the ability to improve yourself. Jesus brings life through the cross. We must die to ourselves and our own vain notions of self-importance if we are to receive the life that He gives. Our pride must be crushed and laid in the dust. The Law must make us nothing in order that, in Christ, we may be made new, redeemed children of God, whose joy and glory is only the Lord Jesus and the salvation He brings. With Christ we must crucify the desires of our flesh for pleasure and self-promotion. These are useless and keep us from Christ. And thus we rejoice in our afflictions because it is through our afflictions that we are delivered and kept safe from this

world. It is through suffering and testing that we are drawn to Jesus and kept near to Him as the devil assails us.

Let us then, with rejoicing, with John and all who have gone before us in the faith, confess and not deny but confess confidently and boldly before the world and in the face of Satan himself “I am not the Christ. I am nothing but a sinner. Jesus of Nazareth, He is alone is the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away our sin. It is in Him, with His Father and the Holy Spirit that I believe and in whom I put all my trust and hope.” May God root out the pride and arrogance of our hearts and grant each of us faithfulness so that whatever our station in life may be, our only joy may be to receive the Christ in faith and point others to the true and only Christ, Jesus, Mary’s Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

In the Name of +Jesus.