

The centurion said to Jesus,

I am not worthy to have you under my roof. Just give an order and my boy will get better.

Jesus was amazed by the humility and faith of the centurion. His amazement, however, was in contrast to God's chosen people. He says, "I assure you; I have never found this much faith in Israel." What is remarkable, then, about the centurion, is that the humility and faith that one would expect of God's chosen people is, instead, found in a non-Jew and a Roman soldier at that! There is a sense of irony here. Jesus said to them:

Many will come from the east and the west and will find a place at the banquet in the kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the natural heirs of the kingdom will be driven out into the dark.

The natural heirs to the kingdom; the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the people of the covenant that God established through Moses; the very ones whom we

would expect to enter heaven, are driven out into the darkness.

Our Lord's warning applies as much to us, who are the descendants of the new covenant, as it did to Israel, the descendants of the old covenant. In the Lord's amazement, we discover something of what God expects of us as His people. He expects a humility and a faith like that which we witness in the mind and heart of the centurion.

The centurion said to Jesus, "I am not worthy to have you under my roof", literally speaking, to come to my house. Receiving the Lord under his roof, however, is not so much about Jesus coming to the centurion's home, but what this represents. He, himself, was not worthy to receive the Lord. But he placed his trust, his faith, his confidence in Jesus. And so, the Lord does, in fact, enter under the centurion's roof, both literally speaking and spiritually. We know this, because

the servant boy who lay ill under the centurion's roof was instantly healed by the Lord. In some mysterious way, then, the Lord was there. But it was only through the humble heart and sure faith of the centurion that our Lord would enter under his roof, meaning, both the centurion's home and his heart. And it was thus, that the centurion, having himself received the Lord, was granted the healing of his servant boy.

This is the humility and faith that we ought to have, that we too would receive the Lord under our roof, into our home and into our heart. This is most important when receiving our Divine Savior in the Holy Eucharist, where He is truly present, in the flesh.

In the mass of the Latin Rite, in preparation for receiving the Holy Eucharist, they pray:

Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,

but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed

This is a direct allusion, mostly a quote, from Sacred Scripture. Where is it placed in the liturgy, shows us what our disposition ought to be when receiving Holy Communion. In *our* Divine Liturgy, also just prior to receiving the Holy Eucharist, we pray a communion prayer in the same spirit of humility and faith.¹

O Lord, I believe and profess that you are truly Christ, the Son of the living God, who came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the first. Accept me today as a partaker of your mystical supper, O Son of God, for I will not reveal your mystery to your enemies, nor will I give you a kiss as did Judas, but like the thief I profess you:

*Remember me, O Lord,
when you come in your kingdom.
Remember me, O Master,
when you come in your kingdom.
Remember me, O Holy One,
when you come in your kingdom.*

¹ See CCC 1386.

May the partaking of your holy mysteries, O Lord, be not for my judgment or condemnation but for the healing of soul and body. *O Lord, I also believe and profess that this, which I am about to receive, is truly your most precious body and your life-giving blood,* which, I pray, make me worthy to receive for the remission of all my sins and for life everlasting. Amen.

O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

O God, cleanse me of my sins and have mercy on me.

O Lord, forgive me for I have sinned without number.

Can we begin to see how extremely important it is to prepare our souls for the worthy and fruitful reception of the Holy Mystery of our Lord's Body and Blood?

This preparation and attitude of humility and faith, should express itself, not only in the words of our communion prayer, but in every other way, as well. The Catechism says:

To prepare for worthy reception of this sacrament, the faithful should observe the fast required in their Church. Bodily demeanor (gestures, clothing) ought to convey the respect, solemnity, and joy of this moment when Christ becomes our guest (1387).

This is the purpose of the clothing that the priest, the deacon and the servers wear, and what guides their gestures and bodily demeanor around the altar and in the Holy Place. We are not angels, that is, disembodied spirits. We are creatures consisting of both body and soul, a composite, a unity that makes up who we are as a human person. So, what we do with our bodies, and thus, our bodily actions at liturgy, is an essential part of preparing to receive the Lord's Body and Blood. In other words, it's not simply something in our souls, but also in our bodies.

Now, this must be properly understood. We should not be dressing up or wearing nice clothes at church to impress other people. This is not about wearing fancy or expensive clothing. And we certainly should not judge other people by what clothes they can afford or not afford. So, there is a balance here. And the key to this, when preparing

ourselves to receive the Holy Eucharist, is to think about our Lord. What has He done for us by dying on the cross and rising from the dead? And remember that He is here, not figuratively or only spiritually, but in His entirety – He is bodily present to you, and you receive Him in this way under your roof, that is, into both your body and your soul. So, remember these things as you get ready at home to come to the Divine Liturgy. Let the remembrance of the Lord and all that He has done, guide how you will dress for the liturgy, and how you will carry yourself once you arrive.

Consider, for example, what the priest does to prepare for the Divine Liturgy. He first puts on a cassock, and then a riassa (outer cassock), and a pectoral cross. He then prays the screen prayers in front of the iconostasis. This is before most people arrive at church for liturgy. Here is one of the prayers that he prays:

Lord, stretch forth you hand from the height of your holy dwelling-place, and strengthen me for the service I am about to offer you that I may stand before your awesome altar without condemnation and perform the unbloody sacrifice. For yours is the power forever. Amen.

After the screen prayers, the priest puts on his vestments, and as he does so, he prays a prayer with each vestment part that he puts on. And finally, there is the prothesis, the rite (or ceremony) in which the bread and wine are prepared for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. All of this takes about forty-five minutes to an hour. So, as you can see, both priest and laity are to prepare themselves, in both body and soul, to participate in this Great Mystery and receive our Lord worthily in Holy Communion. Why should we take so much care in preparing ourselves for the liturgy?

Consider who is here in this place, the One we worship and receive. It is our King and God, our Creator and Savior, the Lord of the universe, through whom all things were made and

continue in being. St. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians recounts what many believe to be the words of an ancient Christian hymn concerning Jesus. This describes who is present here, the One we worship, the One we receive. St.

Paul writes:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all else that is, and in him all things continue in being. He is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col 1:15–20).

We must not become complacent, to let pride rule us, to allow our faith in Jesus to fade away, and our love for Him to grow cold (Matt 24:12). Let us do our very best, then, to prepare ourselves to receive Him, to foster in ourselves a

heart of humility and faith like that of the centurion. And if we do, the Lord will visit us, under our roof, and work in us the healing of our soul unto eternal life.