**THE HUMILITY OF GOD**

You have probably seen the famous painting by the Seventeenth Century Spanish artist Murillo, of Jesus crucified and St Francis standing close to his side. The left arm of Jesus is nailed to the cross, as it is on the crucifix before us, but his right arm is detached from the cross and resting on the shoulder of St Francis. Francis stands close to Jesus, embracing his pierced side. The right foot of Francis rests on a globe of the world. Francis looks up into the face of the Crucified. Compassion is written on the face of both Jesus and Francis. They share each other’s suffering. Jesus draws up to himself the suffering of the world. His crucified love is poured out, through Francis, onto the world.

Jesus on the cross is the embodiment of humble, crucified love. He leans down to embrace us, whoever we are, everyone, the entire world. The love of Jesus goes out to all of us.

Jesus, in his humble birth and throughout his life and especially on the cross, reveals God his Father to us. He said, “Whoever sees me, sees the Father.” God, then, is not only Love, as John the evangelist, standing by the cross, tells us, but God is *humble* love. Have we ever given a thought to the humility of God? Have we ever imagined that God is humble?

We are used to thinking of God as powerful, almighty, even fearfully so, tremendous. I don’t know whether you have seen the images of outer space transmitted by the Hubble telescope. They are mind boggling. God is the stupendous creator of the universe.

St Francis often addressed God in profound reverence and awe, as, “Almighty, most high and supreme God”, but in his *Praises of God,* Francis expressed another aspect that enraptured him and blew his mind. He exclaimed, “You are love, charity: You are wisdom, *You are humility*”. Humility means that God is turned towards us just as Jesus crucified is turned towards St Francis in Murillo’s famous painting. God bends down humbly to lift us up.

Francis learnt about the humble love of God from gazing in wonder and amazement on the powerless, defenceless Baby of Bethlehem and on the crucified body of Jesus. He recognized Jesus as the eternal Word of God expressed in creation. Jesus is the Wisdom of God expressed by a human mind. He is the Mind of God revealed in flesh and blood. God expressed himself in the humble love of Jesus.

God bends low so that God can meet us exactly where we are, in our sinfulness and selfishness. God singles us out among his myriad creatures, inanimate and animate, brothers and sisters of one another, all children of the Father. God bends low because we are limited, confused, sorely tried, in need of help, needing to be understood and loved. God bends over us in love and meets us at the foot of the cross of Jesus.

The humility of God means that God’s love is so great that God is willing to plunge into the darkness of our lives to bring us to fullness of life in God. God’s humility is expressed most vividly in the cross of Jesus because God could not bend over any further in love for us than in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross.

God humbly bends down to the lowest possible level in order to be God “for us”, in our weakness. The suffering of Jesus on the cross and the loss of his human life is the most intense revelation of God’s humility. The piercing of the human heart of Jesus is the opening up of the depth of God’s love, embodied in Jesus.

Faith often *begins* where Jesus, the powerful healer and miracle worker, is first recognized. But genuine faith *takes root* where Christ powerless and crucified is understood to be God our Saviour, revealing the humble love of God.

Pope Benedict, in his message for Lent, exhorts us to look at Jesus crucified. The Pope writes that on the cross it is God himself who, with astounding humility, begs for our love. Jesus is thirsty for the love of each one of us. The response Jesus desires of us is that we welcome his love and allow ourselves to be drawn to him.

But accepting his love is not enough. We need to respond to such love and devote ourselves to communicating it to others. Jesus draws us to himself in order to unite himself to us, so that we may learn to love others with his humble love.

St Francis wrote in a letter addressed to all his friars, “Brothers, look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before Him ... Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally!” (*A Letter to the Entire Order* (FA:ED I v.28-29, p.118).

May the faith of St Francis, his faith in Jesus, the humble man, and the Son of God, take root in us while we take the time to reflect on the humble, crucified love of Jesus, who reveals to us the humility of God.