

True humility is not bowing and scraping – that would be unnatural to human nature and it would be false. The person with a veneer of false humility is always somehow vaguely oily and unpleasant – the most well-known fictional example is Uriah Heap in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. True humility on the other hand, is almost unnoticeable - someone who is truly humble leaves us with a feeling of being valued and affirmed. This is because humility, if it is authentic, is a companion of love – in fact, it is love's chief strength. And love is simply this: to cherish another as fully as one cherishes oneself; as Jesus pointed out more than once, self-love must precede love of others. We must cherish ourselves before we can cherish our brothers and sisters. This is why a person with who has been badly damaged and left with very low self-esteem or self appreciation – with no self love, in fact – will always find it extremely difficult to love others and to receive love from them.

The mutuality of love lies at the heart of humility; and this is what Jesus is showing us in today's gospel reading: Putting oneself last is an inward vision, not an outward action. It is a way of seeing life and it doesn't mean valuing yourself or caring for yourself less, but valuing others and caring for them just as much. And sometimes this is incredibly difficult for us. Because most of the time we live with the feeling that not only am I the centre of my own world, I'm the centre of everyone else's world too. But

actually, I'm not the centre of anything: I am not the centre, I am a part. Our continual sense of 'I, me and mine' is not who I truly am; this is my ego, my self-image, my social and professional mask – and it thrives on approval, it wants power and it lives in almost permanent fear. It always feels threatened. But the truth is, God is the centre of everything, not 'I, me and mine'. As one of the old philosophers said: "God is an infinite circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."

When Jesus says the greatest among us must make ourselves least, he was teaching his disciples and each one of us, the importance of this vision, this way of seeing and understanding life: because we are all parts and not the centre, we are all of equal value to God, we are all loved and cherished by him, we are all of inestimable worth, dignity and beauty in his sight. *All* of us, not just 'I, me and mine'. These three words are a cage that keeps love a prisoner in our hearts: true humility – putting ourselves last, if you like – is the key that opens the cage and sets love free.