

“But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest place; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go higher.”

What is the most important principle in ordering human society? There are two answers: the world’s answer, and God’s answer. The world tells us that its governing principle is power and control, money and fame. He who has the most power has the most importance; we are especially reminded of this in an election year, with its emphasis on supremacy and control. But these are all simply manifestations of pride, the root sin of all, the desire to be in control, even to put ourselves in the place of God. So of course, God’s answer to the question is simply love, the humility to seek God’s perfect will over our broken and defective human wills. As St. Paul, who describes himself as a prisoner of the Lord, admonishes the Ephesians, “Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” There is a real simple solution for all the world’s problems: for you and me to seek and do God’s will rather than our own. If everybody the whole world over did that, then POOF all the cable news channels would go off the air, Facebook would be reduced to a means of contacting long lost friends, and entire swaths of the economy which exist by inflaming our hatred and envy and lust would be out of business. Of course, that is wishful, even delusional thinking, because we are fallen, and have a propensity to sin, a fact which we have to balance whenever we think that we are capable of building heaven on earth. It is a bit of a paradox, in that we are indeed commanded to pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth as in heaven, but we must realize that it is only going to happen in his time, not ours. If you ever want a lesson in the appeal of wishful thinking, flip through the 1940 Hymnal, and look at texts that were written in the first half of the

twentieth century (look for the date of the words, which is down at the bottom, rather than the date of the music, which is up at the top); and if you read through some of those hymns, even the ones written between the two World Wars, you'll realize, "Wow, they really, honestly believed they were going to build heaven on earth."

But I digress. Even though we acknowledge that merely human love won't conquer all, still we are called to be the vessels of God's love through our own humility, rather than our striving for power. And that brings me to the saint of the day (or at least the saint of tomorrow, September 19)—a saint close to my heart because he is the patron of our campus chapel, St. Theodore. He is known both as St. Theodore of Tarsus and St. Theodore of Canterbury, and in a little while, you will find out how he got from the one place to the other. He was a native of Tarsus in Asia Minor, the hometown of whom else? (St. Paul) In the 600's when the Persians conquered that area (there goes that desire for power and control again), Theodore was driven from his home and settled in Rome, where he intended to live a nice, quiet life as a simple scholar-monk. Well, God had different plans. On the other side of the known world from where he had come from, the Anglo-Saxons nominated to be the new Archbishop of Canterbury a guy named Wighard (and I always think that he must have gotten teased on the playground with a name like "Wighard"). So Wighard set off to Rome to be consecrated by the pope, but with all the sickness and heat of Italy, Wighard pretty much dropped dead soon after his arrival. So the pope was in a bind; he had to send these Anglo-Saxons back an archbishop. The problem was, nobody that he asked was interested in the job. They were already in the center of power and influence, not to mention culture and civilization, and you want us to go where? England?! Well, finally one of the monks who turned the job down, named Hadrian, said "Maybe I know somebody that would

take it—this Greek monk Theodore.” Now granted, Theodore wasn’t even a priest or a deacon at the time, but after prayerfully considering it, he agreed to serve in this capacity that he had never even imagined, and at the advanced age of 66, he was consecrated bishop. So he was already practically ancient by their standards, and then it took him two more years to travel to his new home, so he was 68 by the time he arrived. And don’t you bet the Anglo-Saxons took one look at him and said, “Gee, Wighard, you’ve really aged since you’ve been gone.” Then Theodore opened his mouth and spoke this strange tongue that they couldn’t understand, so he obviously had a lot of work to do before him.

But one of the reasons that we took Theodore as the patron of our college chapel is because of his great promotion of education in the British Isles. In fact, he was the one to bring the study of the Greek language to England (being a native speaker himself); before that, they had to rely on Latin translations. And furthermore, St. Bede, in his history of the English Church, said that the episcopate of St. Theodore was the golden age of the Church in England. And even though all the various little English kingdoms were not yet united politically, they were first united spiritually under Theodore. So in a sense, the English Church predates the English nation. And would you believe it, Theodore ruled that church twenty more years until his death at 88; there was no church pension plan for him, he just kept doing the work God had set before him. He didn’t seek the highest place, he didn’t strive for power and control, but rather was satisfied to sit in the lowest place and in humility wait for the Master to exalt him. He walked worthy of the vocation to which he was called, in lowliness and meekness, and endeavored to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Theodore had no idea what God had planned for him, but he just

labored through every day, accepting what God brought him and sought in all things to do God's will rather than his own.

How different from our approach! We want to be in control, not only of those around us, but ultimately even of God himself. We want to be able to tell God what his will should be: "my will, not thine, be done". We have swallowed the lie that power is the ultimate goal in life, that what really matters is who is in control. But the whole message of Christianity is even God himself, as a Man, humbled himself and relinquished all worldly power. God prayed to God, "thy will, not mine, be done." We can only understand that because God has revealed to us the very mystery of his inner being, that God's nature is loving submission of the Son to the Father; and yet, the Son is no less God than is the Father, for they are indeed one God in their mutual love (and that mutual submission of love is God the Holy Spirit). We fear that humility will mean humiliation, that submission will mean a dehumanizing of ourselves, that we will become less than we could be. But the opposite is actually the case: the more we submit to God, the more his image, buried under deep layers of sin, will be cleaned off by his nail-scarred hands and made to shine as the mirrors of his grace and his love that he intends them to be. And like St. Theodore, we may hear his voice, that powerful and booming Word which commanded the light to shine out of darkness and yet also speaks in a still, small voice, "Friend, come higher."