

At one of the motivational seminars Don Schula gives he told the following story on himself. For those who don't recognize the name, Don Schula was the coach of the Miami Dolphins NFL Football team. He won two Super bowls with them, and was a famous Hall of Fame quality coach.

Well, quite a few years ago Schula retired from coaching. The following summer his wife thought it would be a good idea for them to leave Miami on a vacation when the football summer camps started up. You see, Schula missed the action, and he was feeling a little down. So they decided to go to Maine, far away from it all, with two of their grown children. But things didn't work out very well. Schula found the quaint towns of New England too quiet. He was bored.

One night the four of them decided to go into town to see a movie. So they drove to the town's one movie theater, bought tickets, and went in. The place was empty except for a half dozen people scattered around the seats. But when Schula and family walked in, the lights still being on, one man looked back to see who it was, then he stood up, turned around, and started applauding. Soon the other five people did the same thing. Schula was a little embarrassed, but also touched and secretly pleased. It made him feel good that even in the middle of nowhere, people appreciated who he was, and what he had accomplished. He gave a wave of acknowledgment to the people and everyone sat down and the movie started.

After it was over Schula met up with the man who had begun the ovation and thanked him – and did something he never did – still feeling the glow of the man's approval, he offered to give the man an autograph. At this the man looked puzzled, "An autograph?" Schula, a little taken aback and starting to feel foolish, repeated the offer, to which the man responded by asking, "Who are you?" "Don Schula, the coach of the Miami Dolphins. I won two Super Bowls!" "Oh," the man replied, "I don't follow football much." "Then why did you clap for me?" Schula demanded, now angry from embarrassment. "Well," the man said, "the owner of the theater told us he wasn't going to show the movie tonight unless he got ten customers. When the four of you walked in that got us up to ten! We sure were glad to see you."

"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." In today's scriptures Jesus is calling us to the virtue of humility. But to understand humility we have to define it properly. There are many misperceptions.

Humility is NOT being timid or weak, or having a poor self-image.

Rather, to be humble is to be a hard-nose realist. Only humble people see life as it really is, and see themselves as they really are. Another way of saying this is to look at it from the opposite direction. Humility is the virtue that is the opposite of the sin of pride. The proud person is one who lives in an illusion of his own self-importance. Don Schula -- by all accounts an impressive man -- and humble enough to tell that story on himself, was living an illusion that night in the movie theater. He thought he knew how he related to those people around him. He was wrong. And the reason he was wrong was that he had an exaggerated opinion of his own place.

The proud person, and we're all in that position to a greater or lesser extent, puts himself in the center of the universe. And everything else revolves around him like the planets around the sun. And trouble starts when the rest of the universe doesn't recognize that "fact."

Pride tells me I'm the center of the universe so everybody else's schedule should conform to mine. People should act as, and when, I want them to act so as to accommodate my desires. And if this doesn't happen, watch out!

The humble person, on the other hand, puts God at the center of the universe, and therefore, all must conform to God's will. Do you see why humility is simply being realistic? What is a more sane view of the world – to try to get the world to act as I see fit, or to say to God, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?"

The most basic step in trying to live humbly is to understand and believe in the overwhelming majesty and power of God. The proud person, despite, perhaps his words, doesn't really believe that all good things, graces, and blessings come from God. The proud person deep down thinks rather, that he achieves these good things by himself. He deserves that place of honor at the wedding banquet. People should clap for him when he enters a room!

The humble person refuses to believe in that illusion. He's too realistic. He knows that all the things we accomplish are due to the Lord. He maintains a sane balance with God in the center of life, and himself as God's dutiful servant.

To help form this virtue I want to suggest an image to meditate upon. It's from Luke 19:28-38. Here Jesus sends His disciples into town to pick out one particular donkey – no other will do. Then Jesus makes His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem down the Mount of Olives through the city gate on that simple animal. The people go out to greet the Messiah with shouts of joy and adoration. They lay their cloaks and Palm branches on the road so the donkey's hooves don't even touch the dust.

In living out our baptism and lives of faith properly we are that donkey. Jesus has hand-picked us for a task. It may be a very humble life, but it's with Jesus, and for His service, and, therefore, of infinite worth. The question is: Do we understand our true, humble role in that life, or do we live an illusion.

When we are proud we are like a donkey that thinks all the world's applause, praise and honor are directed at him. And we think we deserve them. We might even go so far as to take a bow in acknowledgement of the world's praise – as Don Schula once did. But by that bow we send Jesus tumbling. We lose Jesus, and then how quickly the cheering stops!

Jesus invites us instead to take the lowest place at the wedding feast, or to be like the humble donkey in the gospel. We may hear the praise of the world. We may receive its favors, but we must know they are due, not to ourselves, but to the Messiah we carry with us, even if we can't see Him. And whether the people who bestow them realize it or not, we, at least, must be realistic: the gifts, blessings, and achievements that come to us are all due to Christ alone – the true center of the universe.