

Chapel Words (November 1, 2008)—Rev. Jim Holland

You may have noticed that one of the themes that comes up often in my talks is the virtue of humility. I recently read a quote by the English writer GK Chesterton who said, “If you are going to preach only one sermon, make it about humility.”

But what about the other side of the coin; what about pride? Some would say humility and pride are opposite qualities, but I don’t think so. For me humility is not thinking less of oneself, or putting oneself down, or thinking that others are better than we are. That is false humility. True humility is not about demeaning ourselves; true humility is understanding that we are always part of something bigger than ourselves. If we see humility in this way, than we can see pride as celebrating that greater thing of which we are a part, and to which we contribute in our own way.

It is interesting that groups of lions are called a Pride. The pitfalls of pride: vanity, conceit, a superior attitude, can become virtues when we apply it not to ourselves alone, as if we are the center of the known universe, but to the groups and communities to which we belong, whether it be family, our House, our School or our nation. Pride only has meaning when it is shared, and when we share pride with one another we all become stronger.

There is a series of books some of you might be familiar with. The books are about a group of students somewhat like yourselves, except they take courses like potions and defense against the dark arts. Have you heard of these books?

I am speaking, of course, about the Harry Potter series; stories about a school called Hogwarts which, like our own school, is organized into houses. Each house at Hogwarts has its own character, its own unique qualities. The houses at Hogwarts compete with one another for a trophy at the end of the year. Sometimes this competition develops into a pride that becomes negative, because it is a pride that divides rather than unites. One house is particularly prideful in a negative way.

The students of Slitherin House set themselves apart from the rest of the school, and care only about themselves. But there is one house that is characterized by a positive pride, a pride that encompasses the whole school. The colours of this house are, coincidentally, black and gold.

Hufflepuff is a house that is known for fair play and friendly competition. One student, Cedric Diggory, seems to embody the qualities of Hufflepuff House within himself. Cedric has a great deal of pride in his house, but he also has a pride in the school as a whole. He has respect for all of his fellow students, and all of the students respect him in turn.

Following his capture of the Golden Snitch during the 1993 Gryffindor/Hufflepuff match, Cedric immediately offers to replay the match once he finds out that Harry had fallen from his

broom under the influence of Dementors. You might also remember that he passes on information to Harry regarding how to decipher the golden egg clue for the Second Task of the Triwizard Cup. He does so in order to ensure fairness and evenhandedness in the contest.

He also has a sense of modesty about his own accomplishments, telling his father that his victory in the Gryffindor/Hufflepuff match wasn't due to Hufflepuff's skills.

True pride is a communal experience. It is cheering on a school team. It is singing the national anthem on Remembrance Day. It is applauding a student who gets up before us to perform in Chapel on Saturday morning. And, sometimes, it is basking in the glow of the complements and praise we receive from our friends when we do something well.

Someone once said: There is this paradox in pride—it makes some people ridiculous, but prevents others from becoming so. I think the difference between the two is in understanding that we are not alone in life, that we are part of something greater than ourselves, and that greater thing, our team, our house, our class, our school is what helps us to become great.

The joy of doing great things is in the sharing of them. It is in feeling a part of something. It is knowing that we are interconnected. True Pride is not possible without a sense of humility. One cannot exist without the other. It is only when we have both pride and humility that we can truly begin to understand ourselves and others.

There is an old Jewish saying: “The man who thinks he can live without others is mistaken; the one who thinks others can't live without him is even more deluded.”