

## *Remember that dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return*

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Dirt is dirt.

Right?

Dirt is dirt, especially if you're trying to get those persistent mud stains out of your best jeans.

Or ground-in footprints out of your carpet.

One clod of dirt is pretty much like every other clod of dirt.

But if you're in the business of growing things, dirt is a lot more than just dirt.

If you've ever tried to grow plants, then you have some idea of how incredibly important good soil can be.

Whether you're growing flowers to make a dark world just a little bit brighter; or you're trying to grow some of your food, you know that good plants need good soil; and among other things, good soil needs organic matter; all of those nutrients that are released when plant and animal matter decomposes and decays; when bacteria and worms and tiny microbes, creatures too small for the eye to see, break down organic matter into inorganic minerals; into the kinds of good things that the roots of plants can absorb.

We might call that compost but in the field of soil science it's called humus.

From the Latin word for earth or ground.

So what may seem to you to be little more than just a handful of smelly dirt is really the 'ground' of life. As one author has said, "from that mud, from its carbon, [and its] nitrogen, [and] hydrogen, [and] oxygen, and assorted metals, a child can be woven."

So, it is no coincidence that the word human comes from the Latin word for earth: humus; just as, in the Book of Genesis, the name Adam, the name for the very first human, comes from adamah, the Hebrew word for soil.

We are made from the earth itself: *dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.*

The atoms that make up that fistful of soil that you can grasp in your hand are the very same atoms that God has fashioned, by his Grace, into you.

We are unavoidably and indelibly the soil that God has crafted, by Grace and love, into creatures made in his own image.

We are humans; clods of mud lovingly made into the image of God.

But, as you may also know, there's another word that comes from this Latin word humus.

A word which doesn't just tell us where we all come from; that doesn't just tell us that we're humans made from the soil of the earth but, rather, tells us how best to be human; how best to live in relation to each other and to the God who has fashioned us.

And that's the word humility.

Humus. Human. Humility.

All intricately held together.

Because being really human; really living as we were made to be; authentically living the life which God has fashioned for us, starts with the recognition that we all start out as dust; every one of us, no matter where we come from; no matter what we do; we are all drawn from the organic matter from which all life is formed.

And humility is not just a matter of knowing that we're dust so that we can be treated like dust.

It's the incredible knowledge that from the basic soil of creation, from the adamah, the humus, God has raised us to be his image-bearers; to be the outward and visible sign to the whole created order of the God whose power and love calls all things into being.

So, humility literally 'grounds' us; it reminds us of where we all come from; of who we are and whose we are; and it challenges us see each other as integral parts of this common humanity; no matter who we are we share one common origin: that we have all been formed and shaped by God from the dust of the earth.

And humility reminds us that we are not self-made, nor are we made from the chance collision of the stars in their courses; but that we are made by a God whose love has spoken us into existence; a God who continues to shelter and nurture us; a God who even now speaks our name.

That's why St. Paul warns us in this week's Epistle against the dangers of what he calls vain-glory.

The Greek word is κενόδοξος<sup>1</sup>, which means, literally, 'empty glory'; the vanity that imagines that we are creatures of our own making and redeeming.

That's why the Samaritan is the one in this week's Gospel who returns to give thanks; the only one who comes back.

Because, unlike the others, he is the foreigner; the outsider; the stranger; the one who can not take the grace of healing for granted.

There is for him no sense of entitlement; no sense that he is only getting what is rightly his.

He knew who he was.

And because he was an outsider, he knew that this healing was a gift. And he returns to give thanks.

So for us gratitude is the first step towards becoming who we were made to be; the first step on the path to wholeness and health.

Gratitude is the place where the things that divide us are broken down; where pride and resentment are turned into the good soil of humility and patience; where vengeance is turned into forgiveness; where fear is turned into trust.

Gratitude reminds us that whatever happiness we may ever have is never just a matter of our own making; we are the beneficiaries of more undeserved moments of grace and compassion and generosity than we can even begin to count.

As long as we remember every day that we are all clods of dirt fashioned by love into the image and likeness of God.

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<sup>1</sup> From κενός, (apparently a primary word; *empty* (literally or figuratively): - empty, (in) vain) and δόξα (*glory* (as very *apparent*), in a wide application (literally or figuratively, objectively or subjectively): - dignity, glory (-ious), honour, praise, worship); *vainly glorifying*, that is, *self conceited*: - desirous of vain-glory.