

When floodwaters from the river started destroying homes in South Texas last summer people went to the rescue of the poor. Highly skilled office workers left the comfort of their clean workplaces and trudged through the mud to build dams and secure possessions because poor people in their city, whom they did not know, were losing their homes. Some of us might find working in the mud a job beneath our dignity. But those workers realized there is nothing more dignified than performing an act of love.

Today's second reading describes how Jesus performed an act of love by doing some work beneath his dignity. Remember that Jesus existed before Jesus existed. Before he was born of Mary, Jesus was already one with the Father. Although Jesus was God, Paul tells the Philippians, he didn't exploit that role. He humbled himself. He took on human form. He decided to work in the mud for a people engulfed in the floodwaters of sin and misdirection. He accepted the limits of humanity, including death. And he accepted the lowest form of death, capital punishment of an innocent man. Because Jesus lowered himself, we can better understand how much God loves us.

Paul urged the Philippians to take on that same mind of Christ, that readiness to perform humble acts of love. One of the greatest obstacles to love is pride. We enjoy being loved more than we enjoy being loving; we enjoy being kind to ourselves more than we enjoy being kind to others. In our culture self-esteem ranks ahead of charity, and self-promotion steals from service. We are led to believe that anyone who works in mud is lowly, even though they may build a foundation for a better society. As we celebrate this holy week, let us be mindful of the humility of Christ, and rid ourselves of the pride which keeps us from helping the poor, from assisting the needy, and from loving the stranger.