

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"What can a donkey teach me?"



Mary D. Ford

On Palm Sunday, the 20th of March, 1622, Francis de Sales preached about the reasons why Jesus rode a donkey (he used the term *ass* or *foal*) during his solemn entry into Jerusalem.

If we can suspend our reluctance to have a beast of burden teach us something about what it means to be a disciple of Christ, our efforts may be well rewarded indeed. Francis tells us that Jesus singled out the donkey "because of its humility, its patience and its obedience."

Regarding *humility*, Francis observed: "The donkey is a slow, ungainly animal, but a humble one. Our Lord, who came to destroy pride, chose to ride this simplest and humblest of beasts, due to his great love of humility and lowliness. God, says Isaiah, dwells among chastened and humbles souls, bidding the humble spirit, the chastened soul, to rise and to live."

Francis continued. "His nature...from the first, divine...he dispossessed himself...took the nature of a slave...lowered his own dignity; the Father's equal in all things, he would still be left out of all human reckoning, bowed with misery, and no stranger to weakness. Yet, humble as he was, he did no injustice to the Father or to the Holy Spirit

in claiming equality of nature, power and wisdom with them...He made his entrance into Jerusalem not on a proudly-stepping horse with gay retinue, but on a simple donkey overlaid with the apostles' rough coats. He would not wow the crowds but rather sought to win over their hearts by gentleness and humility."

The second reason that Jesus selected the donkey was its *patience*. "It will suffer all kinds of ill treatment without retaliating with a bite or a kick. Our Savior's love for this virtue moved him to become a mirror of patience by suffering the rough handling of his passion without a murmur. Humility and patience go together, so that you can scarcely have one without the other. A humble person needs to be patient in bearing the humiliations that come his or her way; a patient person needs to be humble in order to endure the misfortunes of life.

The donkey is humble and patient: for that reason our Lord rode on it to the holy city.

Thirdly, Jesus chose the donkey because of its *obedience*. The donkey "lets itself be laden and led whenever its master wills, submissive to a burden which it makes no attempt to shake off.

Our Lord's love of obedience moved him to give a similar example: our weakness, and it was Christ who carried the weight of it; our miseries, and it was Christ who bore them. God laid on his shoulders our guilt, the guilt of us all. He suffered what our sins deserve."

Tying these three qualities together, Francis preached: "Happy the souls who are pliant and submissive, obedient without murmur or excuse, willingly bearing the burdens laid on them. Like the donkey, these people, too, are the Christ-bearers of our world. But, in order to be worthy of this honor, we must be clothed with the virtues of humility and patience, the reins by which our Savior holds us obedient to his will."

Francis promises that we will be happy if we are willing to bear Christ in this world. We can find fulfillment in being "clothed like the donkey in the apostles' cloaks," that is, clothed in apostolic virtues. We will find satisfaction by living our lives in a humble, patient and obedient manner.

All of this, of course, depends upon our ability to overcome a fourth and final characteristic of the donkey with which we are all too familiar: *stubbornness!*