

I HATE TO BRAG

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Gal 6:14-15

Today's reading is about boasting. So to begin today's sermon, I want to get in touch with my inner rapper, those artists who have turned boasting into an art form:

I give sermons like a real priest should. I hate to brag, but damn, I'm good. I'm not sayin' I'm number one-uhh I'm sorry, I lied-I'm number one, two, three, four and five. I give sermons like a real preacher should. I hate to brag, but damn, I'm good.

Now you may not like rap, especially the stylings of DJ Hovnan. And rap is indeed full of boasting and often other offensive things. But if it's the boasting and crudeness of rap that turns you off, then allow me to let you in on the joke. The inside joke about rap is that while everyone in civilized society pretends to be humble and righteous; in reality, we all have a rapper within. This inner rapper boasts, brags, envies and lusts all day and all night. The rap artist simply exposes and exaggerates a part of us all that we would rather keep hidden. But that's just why we need to be in touch with our inner rapper. Because as our faith constantly reminds us; it's what we can't own up to, that ends up owning us. Yet if we can own up to the shadow side of our egos, offering it up before God and others, all of our boasting and pride might be redeemed for God's greater purpose.

Paul the Apostle, for whatever faults he had, was fearless in facing up to his sins. Paul faced his inner rapper and sometimes even let him out to play. I can boast with the best of them, says Paul to the Corinthians. 'Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I... Are they servants of Christ? I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.' (2 Cor 11:22-23) Paul was an OG, a first century Christian rapper! And unlike most religious leaders of his time, Paul doesn't hide behind false piety; he dares to reveal himself, warts and all, before God and men.

Let's give that honesty a try shall we? I joked that I am a preacher-rapper, but there is some hard truth behind that joke. Sure I spend lots of time preparing and sharing my sermons so that more people will be moved by God. But I also do it because I like the approval it brings. I mean, I don't do it to be number one, uhh I'm sorry, I lied-I do it to be number one, two, three, four and five. And I am not the only one here whose inner rapper comes to church with them. You can hear him in some of the loudest and proudest solos on the altar and choir. You can see her in the fanciest spreads for coffee hour. You can see him behind the plaques that dapple this holy place. Truth be told, even in our holy work in this holy place, we all want to be number one....two, three, four and five. So let's not try to get around all of this ego, just as we can't get around our sin. What we can do, what we must do, is to confess our pride and offer it up to God.

That is what the apostle Paul does in today's reading, confessing and poking fun at his boasting nature, but then offering it to God for transformation. '*May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*' Paul doesn't try to deny his ego and boasting, just as he never denies all of his other sins. His leadership of the church, reflected in his letters, is at times ego driven. What made Paul a saint was not that he overcame sin and floats around in heaven. What made Paul a saint was his constant confession that his sin was ever before him, but in offering that to God, he shared in the self-giving love of Jesus.

For Jesus was the only one who ever fully tamed his inner rapper; the self-glorifying desires of the human heart. If we wish to follow him, we must follow the way of the cross, the revelation and redemption of our brokenness by His grace. This season of the cross is the perfect time to rededicate ourselves to this lifelong discipline. Let us keep before us the reality of our sins, confessing, not denying our ruthlessness and pride. Stay in touch with that inner rapper, for Lord knows we can't overcome our pride on our own. What we can do, what we must do is confess our pride and offer up our boasting before God as St. Paul; 'May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world,' now and always and unto the ages of ages; amen.