20th February 2026

Humility

"A humble knowledge of oneself is a surer road to God than a deep searching of the sciences."

Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*

A recent visit to the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh brought me to a remarkable painting, *Christ Teacheth Humility,* by the 19th century Scottish artist, Robert Scott Lauder. The story of the painting is this …

The rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament after the devasting fire of 1834 prompted the State to encourage the production of large-scale narrative paintings through a series of public competitions. Lauder, based in London at the time, entered this painting into the 1847 competition. The huge painting, twelve feet by eight, took Lauder two years to complete, being his largest and most ambitious work to date. The subject was inspired by the biblical passage in which Christ, using the example of little ones, encourages his disciples to become as humble as children. While the jury admired Lauder's effort, his rich colours and luscious paintwork weren't to their taste, and his submission was rejected. Two years later, however, the "Royal Association for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in Scotland" purchased the painting as one of the first works in the collection of the National Gallery of Scotland.

As I stood before this striking and full depiction of such a wonderful bible story, I got to thinking how important humility is for all of us. And my mind took me to the quote from *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis with which I've begun today. A "humble knowledge of oneself", and expressing that self-knowledge through humility is, quite simply, an "imitation of Christ" in our lives.

What a shame Lauder's great painting was rejected by the parliamentary jury! What a shame it couldn't be seen regularly by our present-day parliamentarians! Might it have encouraged politicians over the past two centuries – and now – to see humility as an important attribute in their service to their constituents and their nation? And for me? I'll keep popping back into the National Gallery or take time to reread the account of Jesus' time with the children, as a reminded to myself of the importance of humility in *every* life, including mine, *all* of the time.

A prayer for today

Lord, may the humble knowledge I have of myself be an imitation of your humility.

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