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MAGDALEN COLLEGE
OF THE LIBERAL ARTS

Word of the day:

LORD

Christ Jesus was God Himself, says Saint Paul, but he came to us as a man, even as a slave, to dwell among us, to preach the truth to us, and to die for our sins: “He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father.”

That’s also what the disciples called Jesus. One day Jesus was preaching near a large lake, where fishermen were working on their boats and washing their nets. The crowd was big, so in order to speak to them from a place where everybody could see him, Jesus got into one of the boats and asked the man who owned it to row a little way out into the water. The man was named Simon.

Jesus preached for a while, and when he was done, he told Simon to go farther out into

the deep water and put their nets down for a catch. Now, Jesus was not a fisherman. He was a carpenter. Simon was the fisherman, and Simon had been out all night, when the fishing was supposed to be good, and he had caught nothing. So he complained to Jesus, but he went and did as he was instructed anyway. And when he and his men had done this, says Saint Luke,

“they enclosed a great shoal of fish, and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.”

That is how many fish they caught, when there wasn’t supposed to be any at all. Simon, whom Jesus would later call Peter, was ashamed of himself. He knew that he was in the company of a great man,

and that he did not deserve it. “Depart from me,” he said, “for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

If you lived in England, you might see LORDS and LADIES once in a while: dukes and duchesses, earls and barons and so forth. You wouldn’t expect them to dress in long flowing robes, not these days, or to sit on thrones. They wear the same clothes we do, they play golf, they drive cars, they go to



restaurants, they watch television, and so forth. They may live in great mansions they have inherited from their ancestors, but otherwise they do not govern much of anything, not anymore. And sometimes the king or queen of England will honor an artist, an actor, a singer, or a professor by giving him the name of Sir, so that he is a “knight” even if he does not know how to ride a horse, or the name of Lord (or Lady, for a woman), even though he has no castle and no family servants and no land.

But when Saint Peter called Jesus LORD, he wasn't just being polite. He meant that Jesus was a RULER: that he deserved to be obeyed. He probably meant even more: that Jesus was THE ruler, whom every man and woman should obey. Now, Jesus never commands us to do what is bad for us. He commanded Peter to cast his nets into the water one more time, and you see what happened. Other lords and ladies command you to do things that profit them and not you, and threaten to punish you if you do not. Jesus is the LORD who sacrifices himself so that we will live. It is a privilege to obey such a LORD.

If you know a little bit of Latin, you may know that the word for LORD is DOMINUS, which doesn't sound at all like our English word. What does it mean? Well, the Latin word DOMUS means HOUSE, and you mustn't think it just meant the building where you lived. The DOMUS was the house and everybody who lived in it and all the work they did there and on whatever land they had. So if you lived on a big farm, the DOMUS was your house, your family, your stables, your pig sties, your sheep folds, all the farm hands and their families, and the teachers of the children. It was everybody, in the big business of a family.

Now there is no way that you can have a farm at all unless everyone does the work that he has to do, in order. And that will not happen unless there is someone in charge: the children obey the teacher, the teacher obeys the mother and father of the children, the pig keeper obeys the foreman of the farm, and so on. The man in charge of everything, the father over all the family and its works, is the DOMINUS, the LORD. A DOMINUS – whose wife is the DOMINA – is the father or grandfather who governs the whole enterprise.

So where do we get the English word LORD? It's a very old word, this one. If you were speaking English 1,400 years ago, you

would not say LORD. You would say HLAFord.

Try it. None of the letters is silent. You say HL just like HL, a H as in HAT, followed by an L as in LAUGH. The A is AH, as in FATHER. The F is sounded like a V. So it's HLAHV-ord. What the heck did it mean?

There were two parts of the word. The first part was HLAf: say it HLAHF,

with a regular hard F. It's our word LOAF, as in a LOAF of bread. That was an important thing in those times in England, when people hunted and fished and kept cattle and chickens, but did not do as much farming as they would do later on. They grew wheat, rye, oats, and barley, which they used for two very important things: bread and beer. The beer was sort of like bread in liquid form, and you'd rather drink it sometimes than drink water, because water can be dirty, and you might get sick from it, but the alcohol in the beer would kill the germs. And then bread was absolutely necessary. It fills you up, it gives your body a lot of the vitamins you need, and you don't have to eat it all at once. Besides, the grains from the oat, rye, wheat, and

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barley plants are dry and hard, so that you can store them over the winter, and make bread from them when you need to.

What's the second part of the word? It was WEARD (say it a little like WAY-ard, but with not so much Y). A WEARD is someone who WARDS something: that is, who GUARDS it. That's why the man in charge of a prison is called the WARDEN: he guards against the prisoners getting out. If you have a WARD in your home, that's a young person you are supposed to take care of and keep from danger. So the HLAFF-WEARD, the HLAFFORD, was the LOAF-GUARD, the man in charge of guarding the bread. That meant that everybody in his household, and the farmers in the lands all around him, depended upon him to keep their food supply safe from thieves and invaders.

It's nice to think of Jesus as our DOMINUS, the ruler of the house of God, the house of the Church, and our own house, and as the HLAFFORD, the ruler who guards and gives out the bread that nourishes us, which in our case is the bread of life, in Holy Communion.



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