

The Virtue of Humility

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On the occasion of the feast of Saint Mary, we will speak about one of her greatest virtues, and that is, 'humility'.

Humility is the first virtue in spiritual life. It is the vanguard that protects virtues and talents. Every virtue that is not accompanied by humility is likely to be snatched away by the devil of vain glory, and destroyed by conceit, boastfulness and self-admiration. Therefore, if God has granted you any talent, pray that He may also give you humility with it, or take it away from you, lest you should fall into pride because of it and perish.

Humility is the basis upon which all virtues are built. It is not a separate virtue that stands alone, but it is interwoven in all virtues like the thread that goes through every bead of the rosary.

God gives his gifts to those who are modest because He knows that those gifts will not be harmful to them. The holy Bible states that God reveals His secrets to humble people, who become more humble in as much as God gives them glory. Therefore, God calls us to be humble, and humility and meekness were among the prominent characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, making Him beloved by all people. The holy Gospel described Him by saying that He was *"meek and humble in spirit."*

The saints have perfected humility in a curious manner. They were not only humble before God and people, but they were even humble before devils, defeating these devils with their humility.

When the devils fought violently against the great Saint Anthony, he used to answer them humbly, saying, *'You, who are mighty, what do you want of me, the weak person, while I am incapable of fighting against the weakest one among you?'*

Saint Anthony also prayed to God saying, *'Save me, O God, from those who think that I am something of value, while I am merely dust and ashes.'* When the devils heard this prayer that was full of humility, they disappeared like smoke.

Once the devil appeared to the ascetic monk, Saint Macarius the Great, and said to him, 'Woe to us from you, O Macarius, what things do you do that we do not perform? You fast and we do not eat,' you keep awake at night and we do not sleep,' you live in the wildernesses and in barren places and we do the same, but you defeat us with one thing.' The great saint asked him, *'And what is that thing?'* The devil replied, *'With your humility you defeat us. '*

On another occasion, Saint Anthony saw the traps that were laid down by the devils, so he threw himself on the ground before God and cried out saying, *'O Lord, who can be saved from these traps?'* Then he heard a voice saying, *'humble people shall be saved from them. '*

If humility has such power as to defeat devils, what then is humility? Humility is to be aware of your weakness, to know your fallings and sins, and to treat yourself according to this assumption.

Humility is not a state in which you feel that you are great and try to appear to be small, or to hide your greatness, since the mere feeling that you are great implies a kind of pride, and your feeling that you hide your greatness includes a feeling of greatness that is obvious to you.

Real humility is firstly a feeling of humility before yourself, a genuine feeling within your inner soul that is not counterfeit, and an appreciation of the fact that you are weak and sinful. Even in the height of your strength, you feel that this strength does not originate from yourself, but that it is a heavenly gift from God to you; as for you, your nature is something different.

My brother, you should know what you are, because this knowledge leads you to humility. You are from the dust of the earth, nay, but the dust is older than you; it was present before you existed; God created it first, then He created you from it. You may remember the following lines of poetry:

*"O dust of the earth,
The grandfather and the grandmother of all people.
You are my origin,
You are older than Adam.
You are my fate when I lie in a tomb. "*

My brother, if you contemplate upon the matter with humility, you will find that this dust has not angered God as you have done through your sins.

I wish to share an important fact with you, that is, that God alone is humble.

God is great and He condescends to talk to us, who are small. He is Holy and He condescends to deal with us, who are sinners. As for us, humility on our part is not to be considered as condescension, but it is merely a perception of ourselves.

If you are aware of this fact, then you should treat yourself in a way that is consistent with this knowledge, and not claim dignity or glory from other people. If you are tempted in connection with this matter, you may answer yourself saying *"I do not deserve anything because of my sins, and if God, through the abundance of His mercy, has concealed my sins from people, yet I know about my sins very well and I do not forget them, lest I should become proud in vain."*

Be careful not to forget your sins, lest you should become arrogant and have false imaginations about yourself. Try to remember what was said by one of the saints, that is, *'If we forget our sins, God will remember them for us, but if we remember our sins, God will forget them for us.'* Confess your sins before yourself, before God, and if you can, let this also be before people. If you cannot do this, at least do not praise yourself before other people and do not accept their praise of you; if you hear that praise with your ears, let your heart and mind refuse it.

Do not attempt to obtain dignity for yourself before God or people, and remember what Saint Isaac said, (He who runs after dignity will find that dignity runs away from him and he who escapes from it on purpose will find that it runs after him. '

Let not your humility be for show or only by word, but let it be genuine humility from the depth of the heart and with inner faith. Let it be humility in spirit.

If you live in humility, you will always live a life of gratitude. You will thank God for everything and in all circumstances, being conscious that God always gives you more than you deserve.

As for the person who is not humble, on many occasions he grumbles and complains, feeling that he has not attained what he deserves, that he deserves much, and that he is oppressed by people and by God.

A humble person lives in peace with all people. He does not become angry with anybody and he does not cause anybody to be angry. He does not become angry with anybody because he always blames himself, and does not anger anybody because he demands the blessing and prayers of everybody.

Let us all be humble, so that we may deserve the work of God in us, God the infinite, Who has condescended and taken care of us.

To God be glory for endless ages; amen.