

## The Scourge of Human Respect

This past Tuesday was the feast of St Mathias, the Apostle who replaced Judas Iscariot. Now we might look at his election as a great honor, and indeed it was. But Mathias was no fool. Every Christian at that time knew that being a Christian, much less an Apostle, meant being hated, derided, scorned, and ridiculed by the world. Suppose St Mathias valued too much what others thought of him. Suppose he had been controlled by the desire to be respectable in the eyes of the world. He would not today be called St Mathias. He would have refused to do the will of the Lord. He might have even excluded himself from the magnificence of eternal life altogether.

Last Monday was the memorial of Our Lady of Fatima. Suppose our Holy Mother had been controlled by this demon of human respect? Where would she, much less us, be now? Think of the momentous effect it would have had on the world if Mary had been controlled by what others, worldly people, would think of her. But think also of the effect it has on ourselves and others if we give in to it.

The vice of “human respect” does not mean I should not be respectful to others. Nor does it mean that I should be boorish or inconsiderate. What it does mean is that one of my main concerns is what others think of me – being respectable in the eyes of others, or at least to “important” people. It means that what I say and do, and perhaps even think or believe, is determined not by not by the will of our Lord but what others will think of me. It makes us a slave to others and robs us of the sonship we are meant to have.

Almost every good teacher of the faith, especially those writing on the interior life – what today would be called Spiritual Theology – has written on this topic of human respect. Even St Paul touches on it in his first letter to the Corinthians when he speaks about true wisdom vs false wisdom. Paul immediately follows this with: “It does not concern me in the least that I be judged by you or any human tribunal.” The reason for the multitude of writings on this topic of “human respect” is simply because it is such a common temptation and such a common vice that people fall into and end up being controlled by. Don’t be afraid if, upon self-examination, you find that you’ve fallen into this at times or maybe have even made it a habit. It is necessary to recognize the vices we’ve fallen into in order to be free of them.

There has been so much written on this topic of human respect, that I stumble as to where to even start. One of the best presentations I have seen on this topic, though, is from a “Fr Buckley.” I don’t know anything about this priest except that he gave an excellent homily on this topic. The following are some excerpts from his 1891 homily on: The Dangers of Human Respect and How to Overcome it. The full homily/text is available on this webpage: <https://catholicharboroffaithandmorals.com/Dangers%20of%20Human%20Respect.html>.

Here are some excerpts from Fr Buckley....

“We see men of large intellect and cultivated minds hesitating to enter the fold of the true Church, although convinced of its Divine institution, hesitating lest, by taking this final step, they may forsooth incur the indignation of their friends, the contempt of their associates, the loss of their temporal dignity or possessions; they are scandalized in Jesus Christ. We see amongst the children of the Church many who are Catholics by the accident of faith or of early training, but who, led away by pride, by human respect, by shame of the heretic or unbeliever, blush (ashamed) to profess openly that faith in which they inwardly believe; they join in the scoff and the jeer with which religion and its Founder and its ministers are ridiculed; they argue on the doubts and re-echo the sophisms invented by conscience, that would fain slumber in the belief that no God exists; they fear if they make the sign of the cross, or pray with exterior devotion, that the smile or the jest may be raised at their expense; afraid on the one hand to displease their friends and incur their censure; and, on the other, afraid lest they may bring down on their unhappy souls the indignation of that God whom they insult by such wanton cowardice and such miserable shame.

Indeed there are few of us, my brethren, who are not occasionally the victims of human respect. We sometimes fear man more than God. In order, therefore, that we may correct this vicious tendency, and that we may merit the approbations of Him who has said, "Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me," let us consider first, the insult that is offered to the majesty of God by human respect, and then the folly and impropriety of suffering

ourselves to be influenced in any part of our conduct by the fears of what the world may think or say concerning us. I. Dearly beloved brethren, we were placed by Almighty God in this world for no other purpose than that we might love and serve Him with our whole hearts, and with our whole souls. This is the duty of every human being, no matter in what age he may exist, no matter for what greatness or lowliness, for what riches or poverty he may be distinguished. ...

He who is unduly influenced by human respect transfers the allegiance he owes to God to every human being who may claim it, be he heretic or infidel; he is thus reduced to a most miserable slavery; for the ordinary condition of the slave is to have but one master, whereas the victim of human respect has as many masters as he has associates whose approbation he seeks, whose anger or censure he dreads, whose sneer or derision he is careful to escape. Such a total and capricious sacrifice of one's own conscientious convictions is nothing short of blank idolatry....

Those who are influenced by human respect have tongues that utter no sentiments but those which others may applaud; they have ears that watch to catch the floating opinion of the crowd, that their own may be found according to the vulgar standard; they have eyes that see not their own contemptible subserviency, and their own wretched degradation; they have feet that walk not in the ways of God, but follow in the wake of those that insult and deride Him. Shameful servitude! infinitely more degrading than any physical bondage to which poverty or even crime subjects the outcast of society or the victims of the law.

One case, in which human respect most commonly exercises its pernicious influence is, where a man has been in the pursuit of sin for years, and who is now sincerely desirous to return to God, but who is deterred from the work of conversion by the fear that his new conversion of life may excite the ridicule of those with whom he had been associated in his former career of vice. What an insult does this wretched man offer to God by his despicable fears and miserable apprehensions! He knows that he ought to return to God; that, though late his return, yet God receives the sinner at any hour: he knows that sin brings nothing to the soul but disappointment, sorrow, and anguish; that it is better now to brave all difficulties and turn his thoughts heavenward, where alone true peace and comfort are to be found; his mind is made up; farewell sin, welcome God; but he just then remembers how he must forsake his bad companions; how he must not now sit long and drink deep as of old; how the blasphemous exclamations and obscene jest must henceforward be met with a frown instead of a smile; how his penitent air will afford his boon companions an occasion for ribald mirth and sarcastic joking; how he must absent himself from the jovial gathering to pray, or to confess, or to receive the Body of His Lord, and how his absence will be remarked, and many a scurrilous comment greet his return to the festive throng. The temptation is too strong; his self-love is too deeply rooted; he gives up the idea of conversion for some other occasion. What an insult does this miserable man offer to God! He prefers the esteem of some few sinful, misguided men to the esteem of his Great Creator!

But the insult to God is scarcely less reprehensible than the folly and impropriety of those who allow themselves to be influenced in religious matters by human respect. For such persons seek to meet by their conduct the approval of all those with whom they come in contact. Now, this is perfectly impossible, for, live as you please, lead a life of virtue or of sin, and you cannot. Do your best, conciliate the esteem and approval of all men; if you are virtuous, the wicked will sneer at and deride you, no matter how they may internally approve; if you are wicked and worldly, the virtuous and good will pity and reprove you. Since, therefore, you cannot be commended by all mankind, why not prefer the approbation of the good, especially as your own conscience internally approves the verdict they pronounce? It is impossible that men should all agree in any one point; their passions and prejudices will always prevent a cordial union of their opinions. Do you seek to amalgamate elements essentially discordant? You care not for the observations of men in the ordinary transactions of life. Why will you pay them such deference when the great question of your eternal salvation is at stake?"

-----

Thank you, Lord, for providing us with Fr Buckley and the gift of light you gave through him. May he rest in peace. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.