

How fitting it is that a little series of articles on humility spills over into Advent, as people begin to think about Christmas and put up Nativity sets. We need representations, examples, of living out humility and the birth of our Lord in a cave that was used as a livestock shelter ranks among the top examples, surpassed perhaps only by His Passion. Undoubtedly these examples of our Lord Himself, as well as that of Mary & Joseph and Sacred Scripture, led St Augustine to say: “**almost the entirety of Christian teaching is humility.**” Thus, we continue the pursuit of refining our understanding of this fundamental virtue so as to be able to live it out well.

St Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between humility towards God and humility towards other people. He says that humility is first and foremost towards God, although there is a certain humility towards one fellow man as well. Thus, when we speak of humility, we will be speaking of humility towards God, unless otherwise noted.

This is immediately helpful in understanding humility. Although there is a certain humility towards others, it does not mean bowing down before others, and certainly not like we must do with God. This is perhaps a false understanding that many people have of humility. It also helps direct our attention. Am I humble before God?

For any “church-going” Catholic, it is surely apparent that the world has made a widespread decisive turn away from God, a turn which begins (or began) with pride, a rejection of humility. Here we see especially the death-rattle of Satan: I will not serve, I will have my own kingdom, I will be a god unto myself. As mentioned before, Fr Vincent Micelli laid out the new atheism in his book “The gods of Atheism.” The progenitors of this new atheism were “philosophers” from the 1800’s and one does not need to read much of their writings before realizing that their cry was the prideful cry of Satan. The “authors” of this new atheism arbitrarily, without any rigorous reasoning or questioning or any logical rigor at all, cast the one true God aside and in His place enshrined man and his desires as “god.” Listen to almost any talk today – news, entertainment, politics, even people’s casual conversations, and it is fraught with man being the supreme judge. The rampant sexual immorality is but one example of this arrogance before God: I am the decider of what is right, good, and true. Use of sexuality outside of marriage, cohabitation, contraception, same-sex acts are all now pridefully declared by man to be good. The very definition of pride is rejection of God. Do not think that one can pass through this life pridefully and then be welcomed into the Kingdom of Heaven? A slave to pride is a worshipper of Satan.

But let us not be in too big of a hurry to excuse ourselves. Do not just look out into the world and point fingers at the pride of others, as true as that might be. How many Mass-attending Catholics today want to reject that which God has established? Let us take the simple case of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The humble man, whose sincere interest is relation with the Lord and doing the will of God, comes to Mass with the mindset of: I don’t care about my own desires, I want to see Mass celebrated, and participate in Mass, in the way laid out by the Church. The prideful man says: here’s what I want, here’s my opinion, here’s what I think we should do. Which is more prevalent today? The prideful mindset is far from rare.

The question being pursued is: how to practice the virtue of humility towards God? Abiding with His Mystical Body – the Catholic Church – is one way. And who is the head of that body? It is Christ Himself, not you, not me, not even the Pope. How do I rebel against that? By saying that I will not be anything other than the head, I should be the head. This is pride, this is grasping at something that is not yours to have, it is a prime example of going beyond what you are meant to be, of going beyond your God-given role – that which humility is meant to restrain. A person has to choose to practice it, which is why specific examples are being given – to help see what practicing it in everyday life means. When I “come to the Church” do I rear back and say: ok, now I’m here and I’ll set all things straight (I am god), or do I bow humbly before our Lord and His Church saying: please Lord, teach me in and through your Church, please Lord, help us worship You according to Your good will, according to the instructions you give us through your Church? Does popular opinion or popular practice (pride) determine what is right, good, and true or is it what the Church tells us?

How many people sitting in Catholic pews believe their own ideas or decisions take precedence over what God has revealed, established, ordained? How many even bother trying to find out what God has revealed, i.e., how

many bother trying to learn more about the faith? The proud assume they know best, indeed know everything, while the humble seeks to know what our Lord revealed. Our Lord Himself established the governance of the Church, namely the Magisterium – Pope & Bishops – with priests having a role but a lesser one. And yet how many come to the Church thinking popular vote, especially my vote of course, governs the Church, not fidelity to God. That is pride, towards God. The humble person insists on the structure established by Christ. There's a supposed shortage of priests. Well, I think we should have women priests, says the prideful, in spite of the fact that our Lord has said otherwise, which is known with certainty because it has been dogmatically declared. Well, who does God think He is? I know better. I arrogate that decision to myself. How many Catholics have declared themselves perfected and placed judgment on our Lord's sacrament of mercy – the Sacrament of Confession, rejecting it outright by their own supposed authority. This is all foolish pride. There is only one way to be part of the Mystical Body of Christ, His Church, and that is by embracing humility. The humble build up the Kingdom, the Body of Christ, the proud tear it down, sadly all too often from the inside.

Let us step back for a moment to see the good of humility. The preceding paragraphs have been looking at ways in which a person practices pride and thus showing ways to practice humility. To whatever extent I have become prideful, I will disdain humility, I will try to avoid it, reject it, turn my nose up at it, even become bitterly enraged against it. The pride of Satan leads to the rage of Satan – another thing common in the world today. And removing it will not be painless. It is like, say, removing a terrible, large boil. In order to do it, in order to embrace humility and reject pride, we have to see the good in it. As St Bernard of Clairvaux said: “The toil will be easier if we have the profit before our eyes.” There are no words that makes a person see “the profit” right away. You will have to stop and spend some time thinking about it. Maybe use the Litany of Humility. As you go through each item, think about how much easier, more peaceful, less stressful, life would be even here on earth if pride is dropped and humility embraced. Think about how much easier and how much more pleasant it is to be around a humble person than a prideful one. Have you ever felt threatened by someone who is more on the humble side? Conversely, are you not always on guard around a prideful one, lest you say or do something for them to attack you with? Pride not only hurts other people but it hurts the prideful person most of all. When our Lord said: “come to Me all you who are burdened and weary and I will give you rest,” this unburdening occurs, first, through an embrace of humility. If everyone in the world embraced humility, how much more peaceful and amenable to eternal life would this world be. St Bernard said: “the first food is humility: bitter but medicinal.” It is a matter of self-denial.

What is the profit of humility? All virtue builds happiness – a happiness that culminates in Heaven but begins even here on earth. And humility *is* the foundation for all other virtue, there can be no other virtue without it, which means that it opens the door to all other virtues. These other virtues, then, also create a sound mind, a sound spirit, a peaceful mentality. Let us take the necessity of humility for faith as a first example. Faith enables a person to know truth, reality, and this embrace of the truths revealed by faith lead to a new perspective and understanding, which gives fresh new life, it is enlivening. But one cannot have faith without humility. This is not difficult to see. An act of faith says: yes, Lord, I accept all that you reveal and teach definitively in your one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I don't know why, the humble man might say, it's wrong to use sexuality outside of marriage or why women can't be priests but I know that's true because...God said so. That is a statement of faith but it takes humility to do it. Recall the centurion who asked our Lord to cure his servant; he said to our Lord: I am not worthy that you should come under my roof; just say the word and I know it will be done. The Lord marveled at his faith, but that faith was preceded by humility – I am not worthy.

There can be no genuine love – of God or neighbor – without humility either. There is correlation of 1 (100%) between pride and self-interest, and self-interest is the very definition of a lack of love. Only when one esteems himself little can he sacrifice for (love) another. St Paul said: “let those who have wives live as though they had none...and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.” This is an exhortation to humility. How quickly the slightest degree of worldly “success” and comfort leads one down the path of foolish pride, of false confidence in me. The humble is confident in God. These are irrefutable truths. What will you do with them? God bless you, Fr Kuhn.