

You can't hardly turn a single page of Sacred Scripture without a directly or indirect exhortation to the virtue of humility and a condemnation of pride. The name of this virtue comes from the Latin word *humus*, meaning of the earth or soil. This root meaning has several implications but one is that humility is a root – from which all else grows. Humility is not the highest virtue (charity = love of God is the highest) but a person cannot have any other genuine virtue without the virtue of humility.

What is humility? This is a good question. While almost everyone probably has *some* idea of what humility is, there can be a lot of misunderstandings about what it is, or how to practice it, or at least an incomplete understanding of it. Given its essentialness, we need to make sure we know what it is.

Volumes have been written on this virtue – many, many saints have spoken and written on it, all of them have exemplified it. Almost all of the good teachers of the faith touch on this virtue, which reflects its importance. So there is no shortage of references and no shortage of things to say about it. I think a good place to start, though, is with Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val's (1865-1930) "Litany of Humility." This little litany is not only a good prayer but also serves as a very practical instruction on what it is and how to grow in this virtue, and it can also serve as an examination of conscience. As a person prays (or even just reads) this litany, they will probably recognize that they do, or are controlled by, some of the things listed in this little Litany:

The Litany of Humility

O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, Hear me.

From the desire of being esteemed, Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being loved, Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being extolled, etc.

From the desire of being honored,

From the desire of being praised,

From the desire of being preferred to others,

From the desire of being consulted,

From the desire of being approved,

From the fear of being humiliated,

From the fear of being despised,

From the fear of suffering rebukes,

From the fear of being calumniated,

From the fear of being forgotten,

From the fear of being ridiculed,

From the fear of being wronged,

From the fear of being suspected,

That others may be loved more than I, *Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*

That others may be esteemed more than I, *Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*

That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease, *etc.*

That others may be chosen and I set aside,

That others may be praised and I go unnoticed,

That others may be preferred to me in everything,

That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should.

How much angst do we put ourselves through precisely because of the disordered desires and fears that Cardinal del Val lists? How much more at peace would a person be if they were free of these things, if they truly had the desires Cardinal del Val lists at the end? How much irritation, frustration, anger, and so on do people experience in...the workplace, politics, family life, and any interactions with others because of one or more of these things that is controlling them – playing them like a fiddle, over and over again? Think of what it would be like to be free of the things listed in first two-thirds of this litany.

Notice that this litany *is* a prayer. The person praying it is asking our Lord to really come to their aid and deliver them from these things. Think about the good of it – how it would be a great unburdening to really be relieved of these confounded things, whose root cause is original sin. Thinking about that will enliven your prayer, make it sincere. If the Son of Man sets you free, then you are free. Raise your mind to the Lord and He will hear your prayer, He *desires* to deliver us from these things, He is pleased to hear this prayer. My encouragement is to keep this prayer by your bedside and pray it the first thing in the morning. This would be an excellent way to start the day and orient your whole mind, the whole day, to the Lord. Even if you pray it slowly and thoughtfully, it will only take a couple of minutes. You will find that it does make a difference. If/when you drift, go to Confession and get a new start. As you pray it, you might even think about the ways and how often you are controlled by these desires or fears, which will add sincerity and earnest to your prayer. If a person thinks they are beyond the need for such a prayer – good for somebody else, maybe, but not me, I'm too advanced, too important (blah-blah-blah) – it is a sure sign that the person needs it, and probably more than others. Since humility is the root of all virtue, there will be temptations, and strong ones, against it.

We have to have the grace of God to grow in any virtue, and this is what the litany is asking for. At the same time, we have to choose to use that grace. And that choice has to be made precisely at the times when one of things in the litany comes along. So suppose I'm ridiculed and the ire starts to build. I need to stop and say: NO, what difference does it make what others think – the Lord is the judge and He is absolutely infallible; the important thing is to be united with Him and nobody, no human opinion, can take that from me unless I allow it.

Growing in humility is a struggle, it requires a real interior fight. Even right now, if you've read through the Litany of Humility, there's probably some interior resistance to it. There's multiple reasons for that – the passions that were disordered by original sin and temptations attacking it. But another cause, which is probably related to the previous two, is not really knowing or understanding what the virtue is and what it's not. For example, someone might read through the litany and think it means to set aside the virtues of justice or magnanimity. Well we do have to be ready to put up with some injustice – the greatest injustice in human history was the crucifixion of our Lord – but humility does not entail setting aside other virtues. The Litany is an excellent starting point but we do need to learn more about this virtue – what it is and what it's not.

One of the great instructions on virtue – visible examples – are of course the saints. This is why it is helpful to study the lives and writings of the saints. I will repeat: St Jerome said that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ, but I think we can also say that ignorance of the saints is ignorance of Christ because the saints show us how to live out what our Lord taught. There are countless examples of humility amongst the saints. Even now a whole flood of examples is coming to mind just offhand, but only a small sampling can be provided here. Recall a couple of the petitions from the litany – fear of calumny and being wronged. St Vincent de Paul provides an example of this, while at the same time not setting aside truth or justice. Some money was stolen from the owner of the house where he was living and the owner not only accused him but went up and down the street making sure everybody knew of his accusation. St Vincent de Paul simply denied it – once – and then left it be. For 5 or 6 years he lived under the cloud of this accusation until finally the real thief confessed. He bore the wrong patiently. St John Vianney was one of the greatest priests in the history of the Church, and quite possibly the greatest parish priest, yet he was frequently looked down on and considered a simpleton by many of his fellow priests of the time. St Thomas Aquinas was one of the most brilliant minds in the entire history of man. When he was a seminarian, an older seminarian offered to explain some theology to him; Aquinas graciously accepted. When the older seminary hit something he couldn't explain, Aquinas explained it to him! St Rita of Cascia, who was often treated poorly by her husband, is another outstanding example of humility. Perhaps we will continue with this virtue next week. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.