

Since humility is such a crucial virtue – there can be no other virtue without it, not even faith. Thus, it is more than a little helpful, it's even necessary, to understand what it is and thus how to practice it, according to the will of our Lord. One thing to avoid is what's called "false humility." If a person begins to try and really turn to the Lord, this will almost certainly be one of the temptations they will face, one aimed at derailing them...*and* it will be subtle, you likely won't see it coming. So what might be some forms of this false humility?

Bearing firmly in mind that humility pertains to truth, especially the truth about ourselves, helps to see several forms of "false humility." One example seems to come from "scientists" who claim that man is nothing more than another animal. It would be easy to think something like – well, humility is that virtue by which man esteems himself little so I suppose I should accept that in humility. But that is a falsehood and genuine humility is never contrary to truth. Animals are controlled entirely by the passions/"instinct." As a person allows themselves to be controlled more and more by their passions, they do, in a certain sense, become more and more like an animal, that's true. But that truth should elevate one's mind to the truth that: this is not the way I am meant to be. I am not meant to be an animal but something much greater than that, I am meant to be a son or daughter of my Heavenly Father. That is not pride, we must *humbly* accept that, but we must accept it. In fact, if we do accept that truth, that reality, it will help us (provided we fight against the interior movement towards pride) toward a greater humility because I will begin to realize how I have fallen well short of what I am meant to be. So one false humility: man is just another animal. Such a false belief will only degrade man further.

While this is very much related to the first, another form of false humility bears mentioning explicitly. There is a lot of demand in our society today to bow down to immorality and all sorts of falsehood. It would be easy to believe that doing so would be a practice of humility. Humility does not entail force but it does entail truthfulness and so it can never involve bowing down to or accepting such falsehoods. To say no to what is wrong, false, and evil and yes to what is right, good, and true is not a lack of humility, that is fidelity to God and a genuine love of neighbor by willing for them what is truly best – that they be united with the one true God. In doing so, you may have to bear the wrath of Satan, which humility will enable you to do. Be careful with this though – it doesn't mean that just because *you* think something, that means it's true. That could be pride. The truths that we are talking about here are those revealed by God and taught by His Church. Remember, while there is a legitimate humility towards others, humility is first and foremost towards God. In fact, humility would rightly oppose the pride of those who think that just because they think it, it's right.

Original sin corrupted man's God-given faculties – the intellect was dimmed, the will was weakened, and the passions were disordered. The passions, once again, are our feelings, emotions desires – our appetites. Prior to original sin, these powerful forces (desires) actually directed man towards his true good, his true source of happiness and fulfillment (towards his Father) – Adam & Eve desired God. But now they actually direct us away from our true and ultimate good. Now every virtue pertains to one of these faculties that was "deformed" by original sin – a particular virtue "remakes" them like they are meant to be. Prudence, for example, is a virtue meant to perfect the intellect – to make it like it is meant to be. St Thomas Aquinas takes up the question of: what faculty does humility perfect – the intellect, the will, or the passions? It's important to say: which one is it aimed at directly, because practicing it involves all 3. Aquinas points out that humility does rely on our thinking – thus the intellect is involved; we have to know, for example, what it is; we have to know ourselves, especially ourselves relative to God. So exercise of the virtue does involve our thinking, our reasoning, it does involve knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. However, in terms of what humility is *directly* aimed at, Aquinas points out that it pertains to desires – i.e., the passions. Man now has a disordered desire to reach beyond what he is, to make himself a god, to self-glorify, and it is this, Aquinas points out, that humility is meant to restrain so humility per se pertains to the passions. Notice how consistent this is with the Litany of Humility. Cardinal Merry del Val says: from being of afraid of ... this is a passion; from the desire of ...being honored for example. All of these things pertain to disordered desires. This is what makes his litany such a good prayer and a good source to examine ourselves with.

Coming back then to false humility, realizing that humility pertains to desire, to the appetites, means that humility is not *just* a matter of external actions (what we say & do) – although a true humility will affect that as well) but it pertains specifically to interior dispositions (desires). This leads us, then, to perhaps the most common form of false humility: trying to *pretend* externally, with words and actions, that one is humble without any real effort to actually build the virtue, without any real effort to deny these interior movements. This is a common way to avoid building this virtue, don't underestimate it. Be very careful not to think you're beyond falling for it. Yielding to attacks on humility, maybe especially this temptation to pretend at it, can even corrupt our religious practices. A person begins to enter into conversion somewhat, they start to think more about the Lord, start trying to really pray and maybe study the faith and then it comes (a very common temptation at this stage)...the person starts to keep a resume in their mind of all of their prayers, and holy hours, and so on and then what happens – they start to think how wonderful they are and how much better they are than the rest of the riff-raff. Be on guard against it. Thinking it can't happen to you means you've already opened yourself up to it and it won't be long before it overtakes you; in fact, it's probably already happened.

So, although it affects and/or involves our intellect and free-will as well, humility pertains directly to, or aims most immediately at, the appetites – the passions, feelings, emotions, desires. It restrains the *desire* to self-glorify, to reach beyond what I am meant to be, to be a god unto myself. What does this tell us about practicing or growing in this virtue? There might be a temptation to say: well I can't help how I feel, so there's nothing I can do about it. It's not true – that's why such a thought is a temptation. The desires act on our intellect and free-will, which means I can control it. So how does this interior movement towards pride, compelled by a desire to “self-glorify” (let's just say for simplicity) work? Well thoughts begin to play around in my mind. The thought (prompted by this disordered desire) comes to me that I should take charge even though it's not my place to do so – a thought to reach beyond what I am meant to be (to be a god) because I am so smart or capable or whatever it is, to grasp at an authority that is not mine to have. Or, I begin to keep a resume in my mind of all of my supposed good works, flattering myself with it over and over again. Or maybe I am tempted to just outright boast about this that or the other, making myself look good in the eyes of others. Or I am controlled by the desire to be approved, recognized, preferred to others and so on, which then, in turn, affects what I say and do. All of these things, and all similar such things, can be controlled, denied. I can choose against them, I can say no to them, and in doing so, I say no that desire – which is the self-denial that our Lord calls us to. In the Old Testament, “sacrifices” often refers to the Temple sacrifices. With this in mind, consider the words of the Psalmist (Ps 51:16-17):

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

The Psalmist then goes on to say: *Then*, Lord, you will be pleased with lawful sacrifices (the Temple sacrifices – livestock, grain offerings, etc). Our Lord, through the Psalms, is telling us the self-denial entailed in humility is: 1) a large part of what He means by self-denial, and 2) it is the first sacrifice we have to make.

Practice of this virtue, then, involves this self-denial. Denial of what? This is where Cardinal Merry de Val's litany is so helpful.

In terms of practicing, and thus growing in/building, this virtue, what we have said so far is that you have to be able to recognize the interior movements towards pride and then choose to deny them. BUT, you cannot, *cannot* and will not, do this by your own power alone. The Lord will have to give you aid – called grace. He will also have to enlighten your mind. In other words, He Himself will have to become your guide. Ladies and gentlemen, PLEASE HEAR THIS – this is why we have, and will continue to do so, exhorted people so much to stop by and pay a visit to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. To stop by the church and speak to Him in His actual physical presence. This is especially where you begin to “hear His voice” and receive His light. I know it because the great teachers of the faith have said so and because I have experienced it firsthand myself. The grace He imparts there is not limited to some group. It is not only for everyone, but He desires to bestow on it everyone. You can and should pray anywhere, but there is no substitute for being in His actual physical presence. It is there especially that He will build your inner room. *God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*