

THE LOST VIRTUE OF OUR AGE

When watching the nightly news, any given station, any given night, there will often be some small news item showing how someone has risen above the crowd and attained some distinctive award or some other accolade. The impression almost always given is that the individual is better than the rest of us. If they do speak it will most often be by putting themselves down a bit, saying that they were just lucky or happened to be in the right spot at the right time. But then the look on their face often betrays their words for deep down they do believe and know that they deserved the honor! They are better! They are the king! They absolutely are the best! And don't forget it!

Take another example from ordinary life, an example almost everyone has experienced at one time or another. A family decides to have a big dinner party for some reason or other - a birthday, a graduation, an anniversary, the reasons are infinite. The people come and everyone thoroughly enjoys themselves and they heap tons of praise and kudos on the host or hostess or both. Then most often, the host or hostess or both proclaim that it was really nothing, that the honor belongs to all who came. The fact is that they busted their butts in working hard and long trying to make this the best ever gathering. Why deny the obvious? Almost everyone there knows how much effort went into the preparation for the celebration.

In both examples the virtue of humility is almost totally absent, though on the surface it seems to be very much present. In the first example, the person is placing all the praise upon himself. He did it! No one helped him! He deserves the praise! He worked hard to achieve it!, etc. At times one can almost hear what the person is thinking: "I am better than everyone else and I don't want you to forget it!" Such a display is not humility; it is total pride, pride almost run amok! And no one will ever challenge him. In the second example, it appears to be true humility as the host and hostess put themselves down. They are openly denying the effort and work they really did do to make it all happen. This is false humility.

So just what is true humility and how does it show itself? Simply put, humility is truth! This fact is often shown by the host or hostess or both simply saying, "Thank you! It did turn out very well!" With these simple words, they admit they worked hard to make it all a success but also admitting that somehow God had a hand in it by helping the individuals involved to use their abilities and talents which He has given them. Bringing God into the picture is not just the right thing to do; it is the proper thing to do for without God's gifts it would never have happened. One should always thank God in some way for the talents and abilities which he has given them and the ability to use them properly. Thus one should thank God who ultimately was behind it all. It is never just our work; it is the work of God being accomplished in this life with our help. And that is the simple truth, a truth so many forget, to ignore or refuse to admit or acknowledge.

Fighting humility is the innate pride found in every human being, in some a mighty force, in most others a hidden, lurking desire to give all credit to themselves rather than to share it with their creator, their God. Basically these desires, hidden or otherwise, are the effects of original sin, something every human has inherited at birth. Sin is what has affected the lives of all peoples from the time of Adam and Eve until the end of time. It is this sin, original sin, which God in his infinite

love, corrected by sending his only Son to become one with humans and as a human while at the same time being God, would give his life to atone and correct the ultimate evil of sin in this world. The tendency to sin would remain, but now all humans would be able to cope with this evil and with God's help could rise above it. God's son, Jesus Christ, by giving his life to save us gave a true and real hope to everyone that they could attain their final destination, an eternal life in the kingdom of God. But this gift always depended on a person accepting it. Free will, the ultimate gift of God to humans, still pervades creation. It is free will which gives us the power and ability to truly love. It is free will which also gives us the power and the ability to refuse love. Without total freedom, there can be no love. The choice to accept or refuse is still ours.

In the Old Testament Book of Proverbs, (16:18) we read: "Pride goes before disaster, and a haughty spirit before a fall" or perhaps the more common phrase, "Pride goes before the fall." Experience has shown time and again just how true this is! In our own time, the last two centuries, several major disasters have proven this to be so true. If the builders of the Titanic had not been so absolutely certain they had built an unsinkable ship and the Captain, believing them and ignoring all warnings of icebergs, the tragedy would never have happened. Or in our own country's history, General Custer, thinking he was invulnerable and that he knew best, ignored his Indian scouts' warnings, with the result that Custer's last stand was also his last fall. Pride can be a fearful power for disaster

In the Gospel for this Sunday, Christ is an invited guest at a banquet given him by a leading and wealthy Pharisee. Everyone present was watching Jesus very carefully. Jesus of course was very much aware of this and he chose this banquet as an opportunity to teach some basic truths. He observed how the various guest were jockeying for places of higher honor, a common practice for one wanting to show their importance, and he spoke to his host about this in two parables. The first was about a person quickly choosing a place of high honor to sit hoping no one would notice. But the host does, and asks him to give his place to another more important person, and the man then shamefaced finds himself at the foot of the ladder, red faced and wishing he were dead. Jesus says that one should have taken the lower place and then be invited to a higher place receiving far more honor. Jesus then says: "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. It is pride that makes one seek subtle ways to ingratiate themselves, only to have the other person think that they are just stuck on themselves. How much better to have the other person learn of one's accomplishment and then want to know that one better.

In the second parable, Jesus says that one should not invite those to a banquet who could do the same for you. Rather, invite those who are nobodies, unknowns, those who cannot return the favor. In their esteem you will then be honored greatly, and even more will God in heaven honor and reward you. Pride is a very subtle fault which can drive a person to do outlandish things hoping for honors, but which most often backfire and can make one out to be somewhat of a self-conceited person not really someone worthwhile to know. To make matters worse, pride is such that it is very difficult to control for it works on one's often inflated ego. Everyone wants to be somebody and they go to extremes to be so. The fact is that everyone is somebody already! Believe this; act on it; let the gifts God has given you shine forth. In a word be yourself. Be what God created you to be. God does not make junk; He made you unique, a true somebody!

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