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"Humility is the gateway to all the virtues"

In his 22 May general audience, Pope Francis concluded his catechetical cycle on vices and virtues, speaking about humility.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

We will conclude this cycle of catechesis by looking at a virtue which is not part of the seven

cardinal and theological virtues, but which is at the base of Christian life: this virtue is *humility*. It is the great antagonist of the most mortal of sins, namely arrogance. Whereas pride and arrogance swell the human heart, making us appear to be more than we are, humility restores everything to its correct dimension: we are wonderful creatures, but we are limited, with qualities and flaws. From the beginning, the Bible reminds us that we are dust, and to dust we shall return (cf. *Gen* 3:19); indeed, "humble" derives from *humus*, that is, earth. And yet the delirium of omnipotence, which is so dangerous, often arises in the human heart, and this dose us a great deal of harm.

It takes very little to free ourselves from of arrogance; it suffices to contemplate a starry sky to restore the correct measure, as the Psalm says: "When I look at thy heavens,

the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" (8:3-4). Modern science enables us to extend the horizon much, much farther, and to feel the mystery that surrounds us and which we inhabit even more.

Blessed are the people who hold in their heart this perception of their own smallness! These people they are preserved from an ugly vice: arrogance. In His Beatitudes, Jesus starts precisely from them: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" (*Mt* 5:3). It is the first Beatitude, because it is at the base of those that follow: indeed, meekness, mercy, and purity of heart stem from that inner sense of smallness. Humility is the gateway to all the virtues.

In the first pages of the Gospels, humility and poverty of spirit seem to be the source of everything. The announcement of the angel does not happen at the doors of Jerusalem, but in a remote village in Galilee, so insignificant that people used to say, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (*Jn* 1:46). But it is exactly from there that the world is reborn. The chosen heroine is not a little queen who grew up coddled, but an unknown girl: Mary. She herself is the first to be astonished when the angel brings God’s announcement. And in her hymn of prayer, it is indeed this wonder that stands out: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for He has *regarded the low estate* of His handmaiden” (*Lk* 1:46-48). God is – so to speak – attracted by the smallness of Mary, which is above all an inner smallness. And He is also attracted by our smallness, when we accept it.

From here on, Mary will be careful not to take centre stage. Her first decision after the angelic annunciation is to go and help, to go and serve her cousin. Mary heads towards the mountains of Judea to visit Elizabeth: she assists her in the last months of her pregnancy. But who sees this gesture? No-one, other than God. The Virgin does not seem to want to emerge from this concealment. Just as, when a woman's voice from the crowd proclaims her blessedness: "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!" (*Lk* 11:27). But Jesus immediately replies: "Blessed rather are those that hear the word of God and keep it" (*Lk* 11:28). Not even the most sacred truth of her life – being the Mother of God – becomes a reason for her to boast before men. In a world marked by the pursuit of appearance, of showing oneself to be superior to others, Mary walks decisively, by the

sole power of God's grace, in the opposite direction.

We can imagine that she, too, has known difficult moments, days when her faith advanced in darkness. But this never made her humility waver, which in Mary was a granitic virtue. I want to highlight this: humility is a granitic virtue. Let us think of Mary: she is always small, always without self-importance, always free of ambition. This smallness of hers is her invincible strength: it is she who remains at the foot of the cross, while the illusion of a triumphant Messiah is shattered. It will be Mary, in the days leading up to Pentecost, who will gather up the flock of disciples, who had not been able to keep vigil just one hour with Jesus, and had abandoned Him when the storm came.

Brothers and sisters, humility is everything. It is what saves us from

the Evil One, and from the danger of becoming his accomplices. And humility is the source of peace in the world and in the Church. Where there is no humility, there is war, there is discord, there is division. God has given us an example of this in Jesus and Mary, for our salvation and happiness. And humility is precisely the way, the path to salvation. Thank you!

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