

Humility, Source of Joy

Humility is one of the foundation stones of authentic Christian life, because it is the "dwelling place of charity." We offer some reflections on this key Christian virtue.

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No man has ever seen God,^[1] Sacred Scripture tells us. During our time here on earth, we have no direct knowledge of the Divine Essence. There is an infinite distance between us and God. Only He, by adapting

himself to our human condition, has been able to bridge the gap through divine revelation. He has manifested himself to us first through creation, then through the long history of Israel, through the words spoken by the prophets, and lastly through his own Son, who is the final, complete and definitive revelation: the manifestation of God himself among us: *He who has seen me has seen the Father.*[2]

What an astounding event, God has become man! Now we have a God, who, in Christ, sees us and lets us see him. He hears us and lets us hear him. He touches us and lets us touch him. He lowers himself to the condition of our human nature, and through our human senses calls us to the intimacy of his love, to holiness. The astonishment we feel at the Incarnation of the Word moves us to contemplate reverently all of Jesus' actions and words. By doing so, we

see clearly that Christ's whole life, from his birth to his death on the cross, is marked by humility. *Since (he) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the Cross.*

[3]

Humility, dwelling place of charity

The message of how much God loves us reaches us through the self-lowering of the Son. Humility is an essential characteristic, one of the foundation stones of authentic Christian life, since it is the *dwelling place of charity*. As St. Augustine stressed: "If you ask me what is the most essential element in the teaching and morality of Jesus Christ, I would answer you: the first is

humility, the second is humility, and the third is humility."^[4] In the humility of the Incarnate Word, we see both the depth of God's love for us and the royal road that leads to the fullness of that love.

Christian life consists in identification with Christ. Only to the extent that we are united to him do we enter into communion with the living God, the source of all charity, and become able to love others with the same love.^[5] To become humble as Christ was, means serving everyone, dying to the old man within us, overcoming the disordered tendencies in our nature that original sin has unleashed. Thus a Christian understands that "humiliations, borne with love, become sweet and savory; they are a blessing from God."^[6] When we accept humiliations in this way, we open ourselves up to all the riches of the supernatural life and can exclaim

with St. Paul: *For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.*

[7]

Causes of unrest

In sharp contrast to the deep, interior joy stemming from humility, pride produces in us nothing but unrest and dissatisfaction. Pride leads a person to orient everything around one's own ego and to judge events from a subjective point of view: whether something is pleasant or not, whether it provides an advantage or requires effort.... What is overlooked is whether something is good in itself or good for others. This egocentric attitude leads a person to judge the behavior and thoughts of others on one's own terms, and to the more or less explicit desire that they should behave as one wants. This explains

how the proud person can fall victim to flare-ups when he feels others are not paying sufficient attention to him. Or he becomes sad when his own mistakes come to light or he sees that others possess greater talents than he does.

A person whose pride gets the better of him, although seemingly successful in life, will often become uneasy. What is he missing to make him truly happy? Seemingly nothing, since he has what he wants. But really everything, since he has lost sight of the most important thing: the ability to give oneself to others. One's own behavior is what makes it difficult to find true happiness. Opus Dei's founder said: "If you ever are going through a rough time, and your soul is filled with uneasiness, it is because you are thinking too much about yourself...My son, if you center everything on yourself, not only are you going down the wrong path, but

you will also lose the Christian happiness you should have in this earthly life." [8]

Pride is always an echo of the first rebellion of original sin that tried to take God's place. The consequence of our first parents' fall was the loss of friendship with our Creator and the loss of harmony within ourselves. The proud person trusts so fully in his own powers that he forgets the need human nature has for redemption. Then not only physical illnesses, but also the inevitable experience of one's limitations, defects and short-comings, can disconcert that person and even lead him to lose hope. Firmly attached to his own tastes and opinions, he no longer appreciates or values positively a point of view different from his own. Hence he finds it hard to resolve his inner conflicts and is subject to frequent misunderstandings with others. This

reluctance to bend to what others want can lead to rejecting God's will as well. He can easily convince himself that God would never ask for what he personally doesn't want to give. Even the very fact of being a creature dependent on God becomes a source of resentment.

Humility attracts others

In contrast, a humble person finds in God's glory a source of joy, the only fount of true joy. Placing himself before God, a humble person discover his limitations and smallness, his condition as a creature. But far from causing sadness or frustration, this realization is a source of deep joy. Humility is a light that helps one to discover the greatness of one's own identity, as a personal being capable of dialogue with the Creator, and to accept one's dependence on him with complete freedom.

The knowledge that the absolute Being is a personal God of infinite perfection, who has created us, maintains us in existence and reveals himself to us with a human face in Jesus Christ, fills the soul of someone who is humble with great happiness. A humble person finds in the beauty of created things a reflection of God's generous love, and wants to share this knowledge with others.

The reaction of a proud person and a humble person are also very different when faced with God's call. A person who is proud hides behind a false modesty, claiming to have few talents, since he does not want to give up the world he has built for himself. In contrast, a humble person is not deterred by the thought that he is not worthy to attain sanctity. The invitation to enter into communion with God, though disconcerting, brings great joy.

As we see in the saints, those who struggle to attain true humility acquire a personality that attracts others. By their daily conduct, they create around them an atmosphere of peace and joy, because they appreciate others' value and show great respect for them. In their conversations, in family life, in their dealings with colleagues and friends, they know how to understand and to forgive. They seek to help and get along with everyone. They recognize how much they owe to those around them, and have no need to insist on their own rights and privileges. Those alongside them can sense the love for God that imbues their life. They inspire trust in others; one doesn't feel judged, but loved.

Beginning again to learn to be humble

Often the cause of the restlessness or pessimism that we may sometimes experience stems from being too

centered on our own ego. "Why do we men become dejected?," St. Josemaria asked. "It is because life on earth does not go the way we had hoped, or because obstacles arise which prevent us from satisfying our personal ambitions."^[9]

It's true that life's difficulties, both our own and those of people around us, can try to stir up sadness in our heart. The same can happen when our defects become more evident, including those we thought we had overcome long ago. Or perhaps we need to accept the failure to achieve professional or apostolic goals we have been eagerly striving for over a long period of time. Rebellion can also well up when we are faced with events or circumstances that make us suffer.

Especially in these moments, and always, we need to renew our resolution, as Don Álvaro advised in

one of his letters, "to begin again to learn to be humble."^[10] We need to ask our Lord for humility, for his humility, and go to our Lady as well. *Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*^[11] Each day a soul in love learns to be humble in prayer. "Prayer is the humility of the man who acknowledges his profound wretchedness and the greatness of God. He addresses and adores God as one who expects everything from Him and nothing from himself."^[12] We recover our peace only when, instead of dwelling interiorly on what has happened to us, we leave our worries aside and turn to Christ.

"Alma, calma"^[13]—with wholehearted determination and with peace. St. Josemaria loved to

repeat these words, which summarize a whole plan of life for a person who, while relying on divine grace, faces every challenge with resolute determination and prudence. When we strive to live in this manner, St. Josemaria's words become a reality in our lives: "All those setbacks that so often made us suffer have never caused us to lose our joy and peace. For we have experienced how God draws out sweetness—tasty honey—from the dry rock of difficulties: *from the rock, he nourished them with honey* (Ps 80:17)." [14]

Our Mother, Holy Mary, reminds us of the need to be humble in order to be close to God. Our Lady is the model of joy, precisely because she is the model of humility. *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.* [15]

1. Jn 4:12.
2. Jn 14:9.
3. Phil 2:6-8.
4. St. Augustine, *Letter 118*, 22.
5. Cf. Rom 5:5.
6. St. Josemaria, Notes taken in a get-together, 25 December 1973.
7. Phil 3:8-9.
8. St. Josemaria, Notes taken during a meditation, 25 December 1972.
9. St. Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 108.
10. Don Alvaro, Letter, 1 May 1990.
11. Mt 11: 28-30.
12. St. Josemaria, *Furrow*, no. 259.
13. St. Josemaria, Notes taken in a get-together, 9 November 1972.

14. St. Josemaria, *Letter*, 29
September 1957, no. 4.

15. Lk 1:46-48.

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