

"Salvation comes through humility"

In his 6 March general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on vices and virtues, speaking about pride.

03/06/2024

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In our catechetical journey on the vices and virtues, today we come to the last of the vices: *pride*. The ancient Greeks defined it with a

word that could be translated “excessive splendor.” Indeed, pride is self-exaltation, conceit, vanity. The term also appears in that series of vices that Jesus lists to explain that evil always comes from the heart of man (cf. *Mark* 7:22). The proud man is one who thinks he is much more than he really is; one who frets about being recognized as greater than others, always wants to see his own merits recognized, and despises others, deeming them inferior to himself.

From this first description, we see how the vice of pride is very close to that of vainglory, which we presented last time. However, if vainglory is a disease of the human self, it is still a childish disease when compared to the havoc pride is capable of. In analyzing the follies of man, the monks of antiquity recognized a certain order in the sequence of evils: one begins with

the grossest sins, such as gluttony, and arrives at the more disturbing monsters. *Of all vices, pride is the great queen.* It is no accident that, in the Divine Comedy, Dante places it in the very first level of purgatory: those who give in to this vice are far from God, and the correction of this evil requires time and effort, more than any other battle to which the Christian is called.

In fact, within this evil lies the radical sin, the absurd claim to be like God. The sin of our first parents, recounted in the book of Genesis, is for all intents and purposes a sin of pride. The tempter tells them, “when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God” (*Gen. 3:5*). Writers on spirituality are especially attentive in describing the consequences of pride in everyday life, to illustrate how it ruins human relationships, to point out how this evil poisons that feeling

of fraternity that should instead unite men.

Here then is the long list of symptoms that reveal a person's succumbing to the vice of pride. It is an evil with an obvious physical appearance: the proud man is haughty, he has a "stiff neck," that is, he has a stiff neck that does not bend. He is a man easily led to scornful judgment: with no reason, he passes irrevocable judgments on others, who seem to him hopelessly inept and incapable. In his haughtiness, he forgets that Jesus in the Gospels assigned us very few moral precepts, but on one of them he was uncompromising: never judge. You realize that you are dealing with a proud person when, on offering him a little constructive criticism, or making a completely harmless remark, he reacts in an exaggerated manner, as if someone had offended his majesty: he goes

into a rage, shouts, interrupts relations with others in a resentful manner.

There is little one can do with a person suffering from pride. It is impossible to talk to them, much less correct them, because ultimately they are no longer present to themselves. One just has to be patient with them, because one day their edifice will collapse. An Italian proverb goes, “Pride goes on horseback and comes back on foot.” In the Gospels, Jesus deals with a lot of proud people, and He often went to expose this vice even in people who hid it very well. Peter flaunts his full-throated faithfulness: “Even if everyone forsakes you, I will not!” (cf. *Mt 26:33*). Instead, he will soon be like the others, fearful in the face of death that he did not imagine could be so close. And so the second Peter, the one who no longer lifts his chin but weeps salty tears, will be

healed by Jesus and will finally be fit to bear the burden of the Church. Before he flaunted a presumption that was better not flaunted; now he is a faithful disciple whom, as a parable says, the master can put “in charge of all his possessions” (*Luke 12:44*).

Salvation comes through humility, the true remedy for every act of pride. In the *Magnificat*, Mary sings of the God who by His power scatters the proud in the sick thoughts of their hearts. It is useless to steal anything from God, as the proud hope to do, because after all He wants to give us everything. This is why the apostle James, to his community wounded by infighting originating in pride, writes, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (*Jas. 4:6*).

So, dear brothers and sisters, let us take advantage of this Lent to fight against our pride.

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