

Chapter One: HUMILITY, THE GLORY OF THE CREATURE

"Humility is not so much a grace or virtue along with others. It is the root of all, because it alone takes the right attitude before God, and allows Him as God to do all."

"They shall cast their crowns before the throne, so saying: Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory, and the honor and the power: for Thou did create all things, and because of Thy will they are, and were created. "-Rev. 4:11

When God created the universe, it was with the one object of making the creature partaker of His perfection and blessedness, and so showing forth in it the glory of His love and wisdom and power. God wished to reveal Himself in and through created beings by communicating to them as much of His own goodness and glory as they were capable of receiving. But this communication was not a giving to the creature something which it could possess in itself, a certain life or goodness, of which it had the charge and disposal. By no means. But as God is the ever living, ever present, ever acting One, who upholds all things by the power of His word, and in whom all things exist, the relation of the creature to God could only be one of unceasing, absolute, universal dependence. As truly as God by His power once created, so truly by that same power must God every moment maintain. The creature has not only to look back to the origin and first beginning of existence, and acknowledge that it there owes everything to God. Its chief care, its highest virtue, its only happiness, now and through all eternity, is to present itself an empty vessel, in which God can dwell and manifest His power and goodness.

The life God bestows is imparted 'not once for all, but each moment continuously, by the unceasing operation of His mighty power. Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is, from the very nature of things, the first duty and the highest virtue of the creature, and the root of every virtue. So pride, or the loss of this humility, is the root of every sin and evil. It was when the now fallen angels began to look upon themselves with self-complacency that they were led to disobedience, and were cast down from the light of heaven into outer darkness. Even so it was, when the serpent breathed the poison of his pride, the desire to be as God, into the hearts of our first parents, that they too fell from their high estate into all the wretchedness in which man is now sunk. In heaven and earth, pride, self-exaltation, is the gate and the birth, and the curse, of hell. (See Note "A" at end of chapter.)

Hence it follows that nothing can be our redemption, but the restoration of the lost humility, the original and only true relation of the creature to its God. And so Jesus came to bring humility back to earth, to make us partakers of it, and by it to save us. In heaven He humbled Himself to become man. The humility we see in Him possessed Him in heaven. It brought Him, He brought it, from there. Here on earth "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death". His humility gave His death its value, and so became our redemption. And now the salvation He imparts is nothing less and nothing else than a communication of His own life and death, His own disposition and spirit, His own humility, as the ground and root of His relation to God and His redeeming work. Jesus Christ took the place and fulfilled the destiny of man, as a creature, by His life of perfect humility. His humility is our salvation. His salvation is our humility. And so the life of the saved saints has to bear this stamp of deliverance from sin, and full restoration to their original state. Their whole relation to God and man marked by an all pervading humility. Without this there can be no true abiding in God's presence, or experience of His favor and the power of His Spirit. Without this there is no abiding faith, love joy or strength. Humility is the only soil in which the graces root. The lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure. Humility is not so much a grace or virtue along with the others. It is the root of them all, because it alone takes the right attitude before God, and allows Him as God to do all.

God has so constituted us as reasonable beings, that the truer the insight into the real nature or the absolute need of a command, the readier and fuller will be our obedience to it. The call to humility has been too little regarded in the Church because its true nature and importance has been too little understood. It is not something which we bring to God, or He bestows. It is simply the sense of entire nothingness, which comes when we see how God is truly all, and in which we make way for God to be all.

When the creature realizes that this is the true nobility, and consents to be with his will, his mind, and his affections, the form and vessel in which the life and glory of God are to work and manifest themselves, then he sees that humility is simply acknowledging his position as creature, and yielding to God His place as creator.

In the life of earnest Christians who pursue and profess holiness, humility ought to be the foremost proof of their uprightness. It is often said that this is not so. May not one reason be that in the teaching and example of the Church, humility has never had that place of supreme importance which belongs to it? And this, again, is owing to the neglect of the truth that as strong as sin is as a motive to humility, there is one of still wider and greater influence. It is that which makes the angels, that which made Jesus, that which makes the holiest of saints in heaven, so humble. The first and foremost mark of the relation of the creature to this truth, the secret of his blessedness, is it not the humility and nothingness which leaves God free to be all?

I am sure that there are many Christians who will confess that their experience has been very much like my own in this, that we had long known the Lord without realizing that meekness and lowliness of heart are to be the distinguishing feature of the disciple as they were of the Master. And further, that this humility is not a thing that will come of itself, but that it must be made the object of special desire, prayer, faith and practice. As we study the word, we shall see what very distinct and often repeated instructions Jesus gave His disciples on this point, and how slow they were to understand Him.

Let us, at the very commencement of our meditations, admit that there is nothing so natural to man, nothing so insidious and hidden from our sight, nothing so difficult and dangerous, as our pride. Let us feel that nothing but a very determined and persevering waiting on God and Christ will discover how lacking we are in the grace of humility, and how unable we are to obtain what we seek. Let us study the character of Christ until our souls are filled with the love and admiration of His lowliness. And let us believe that, when we are broken down under a sense of our pride and our inability to cast it out, Jesus Christ Himself will come in to impart this grace also, as a part of His wondrous life within us.

--NOTE A--

"All this is to make known the region of eternity that pride can degrade the highest angels into devils, and humility raise fallen flesh and blood to the thrones of angels. Thus, this is the great end of God raising a new creation out of a fallen kingdom of angels: for this end it stands in its state of war between the fire and pride of fallen angels, and the humility of the Lamb of God, and at the last trumpet may sound the great truth through the depths of eternity, that evil can have no beginning but from pride, and no end but from humility. The truth is this: Pride may die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you. Under the banner of the truth, give yourself up to the meek and bumble spirit of the holy Jesus. Humility must sow seed, or there can be no reaping in Heaven. Look not at pride only as an unbecoming temper, nor at humility only as a decent virtue: for the one is death, and the other is life; the one is all hell, the other is all heaven. So much as you have of pride within you, you have of the fallen angels alive in you; so much as you have of true humility, so much you have of the Lamb of God within you. Could you see what every stirring of pride does to your soul, you would beg of everything you meet to tear the viper from you, though with the loss of a hand or an eye. Could you see what a sweet, divine, transforming power there is in humility, how it expels the poison of your nature, and makes room for the Spirit of God to live in you, you would rather wish to be the footstool of all the world than lack the smallest degree of it." --Spirit of Prayer, Pt . 1!, p.73, Edition of Moreton, Canterbury, 1893.