



28. February 2024

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 15: "The fight against pride"

The most difficult spiritual vice to overcome is undoubtedly pride. It takes a constant struggle and a strong grace from God to flee from pride and to live in that humility which counteracts and decisively weakens it.

John Cassian describes pride in these terms: "It is a cruel beast, which fiercely attacks even the perfect and can wound with deadly poison those who are close to perfection". We know that it was pride that brought Lucifer down. Intoxicated by his own wisdom and high rank, he no longer wanted to be beholden to God and lost his beatitude. Cassian continues, "The vice of pride, which brought him down, was transmitted by Lucifer to the first human being, and thus was sown in the human being what was to become the substance of all other sins."

As in the struggle against all other vices, we must be clear that it is first and foremost the grace of God that grants the victory. It is therefore in the first instance a victory of the Lord. If we were to depend on ourselves, even all ascetic practices would not be enough to make us triumph, however useful and necessary they may be. Sometimes God allows us to experience our inability, to preserve us from the lethal poison of pride. We know well the example of St. Paul, who received a "kind of sting" to keep him from becoming conceited (2 Cor 12:7). Although he prayed three times to the Lord to take it away, He did not deliver him from this sting (v.8-9). Thus, the Apostle always kept in mind that all his sublime revelations and his fruitful apostolic ministry were not due to his own strength and merits, but to the grace of God.

St. Paul is not the only one who experienced his weakness in this way. In our journey of discipleship, our Heavenly Father, knowing well how toxic pride is, allows us to feel our weaknesses, so that we come to the same conclusion as St. Paul: that we owe everything to God's grace.

But this does not exempt us from cooperating in the fight against pride. In the first instance, we must implore the Lord for true humility and recognise the wiles of pride in our own hearts. We must be clear that pride always tries to hide and that it is, so to

speak, too proud to admit its pride. A person trapped in such a degree of pride withdraws into himself and pretends to make himself invulnerable, not realising what a horrible face his pride shows.

Together with prayer for true humility (which, by the way, is not servility or false submission), gratitude is an effective remedy against pride. As Cassian says, this is what true humility consists in. One can observe that people who tend to pride find it difficult to be grateful.

In this sense, we can examine our heart with this criterion: Are we grateful or do we rather take everything for granted, as if it were our right, or do we even have within us an attitude of accusation, whether against our neighbour, against life or even against God Himself?

Humility - the remedy for all pride - can be learned first of all from the Lord Himself: *"Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being"* (Phil 2:6-7).

In all things, Jesus obeyed the Father and glorified Him. This is also the call that is addressed to us: not to seek to place ourselves in the limelight, but to serve as the Lord did (Mt 20:28).

Here is another point for growing in true humility: the attitude of service. We serve the Lord as His children and we serve people as the Lord served them. Meditating on the attitude of the Virgin Mary towards God will also help us to acquire that receptivity which, in turn, fosters humility.

In addition, we must be watchful over our own hearts, perceiving the proud attitudes and thoughts, turning away from them and presenting them to the Lord. As we grow in self-knowledge, we will find it easier to perceive our pride.

In the context of our Lenten journey, we cannot list all the wiles of pride. There are many good books that help us to counteract this evil. I myself also deal with this topic again and again in my daily meditations and lectures. Unfortunately, it is necessary to do so.

For today, let us remain with the following: let us praise with deep gratitude all that God has done and will continue to do for us. Let us keep in mind that we would never be able to overcome the vice of pride on our own, nor any other vice. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to better identify and combat our pride and to grow in humility. With our eyes fixed on Jesus, let us enter His school to learn how to glorify the Father and serve mankind. Let us watch over our hearts, so that - if possible - we may perceive and reject pride already in its first manifestations.

In tomorrow's meditation, we will look back at the stages we have gone through so far in our Lenten journey, take a deep breath and then focus on a few virtues. Indeed, it is these virtues that must take the place of the vices in our hearts, making the beauty and dignity of our journey with the Lord shine through.

Meditation on the reading of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2022/03/16/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2021/03/03/>