

28. July 2024

Humility: precious flower in God's garden

Eph 4:1-6

Brethren: I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

From the prison that the Apostle to the Gentiles suffers for the sake of Christ, he exhorts the community to live according to the dignity of its vocation. This is a very profound exhortation, which requires us to examine our lives before God again and again. In this way we will avoid all the lightness and frivolity into which we might fall if we forget this warning.

This certainly does not mean that in everything we do we should be tense and scrupulously careful not to do anything wrong. Such an attitude would be contrary to the freedom of the children of God and would diminish the joy of living. St Paul's exhortation, on the other hand, refers to the gift of the fear of God - not wanting to do anything that might offend the Lord - and to the gift of piety - seeking to please the One who has given us this vocation. The awareness that our life, and even more our Christian faith, is a gift received from God, will be a great help in grounding us in the humility that is so important for the healthy development of our vocation.

This is why our beloved Apostle Paul mentions it as the first of the virtues to be practised.

Humility has nothing to do with servility or artificial submission in a slave-like attitude. Rather, it is first and foremost about simply and clearly acknowledging that we have received our very existence and all the gifts necessary for our sustenance. Every human being was once a small and defenceless creature in his mother's womb, contributing nothing to his existence. This awareness of reality must be the basic tone of our lives.

And if, on the basis of this knowledge, anyone feels that he is worthless, he should know that his very existence is an act of love from our Heavenly Father. This is our true dignity: to be creatures loved by God. If we deeply assimilate this double knowledge, humility should be the fruit.

Recognising and living reality as God has intended it for us deepens humility, for now, as a next step, we are to realise that it is He who sets the parameters within which this life He has entrusted to us is to unfold. He gives us the laws of nature and His commandments which regulate our lives. These too are a gift bestowed upon us. Recognising and obeying them will again be an act of submission to reality, showing that we do not by ourselves possess the key to true life.

Humility can be further deepened by the encounter with the event of redemption. Again, it is a gift! Man cannot free himself from the bonds of evil, nor from death and sin; he needs a Saviour. When we become aware of this, humility - accompanied by gratitude - will take root even deeper in our soul, seeing that the Lord did not leave us at the mercy of our imperfection, our inclination to evil, our self-centredness, but that He Himself, in incomparable humility, stooped down to us and redeemed us on the Cross (cf. Phil 2:6-8).

And this virtue will shine even more brightly when we consider our vocation... As in everything else, we do not deserve it, but God freely gives it to us. Thus we are no longer merely His creatures, but are called to live as His children and to bear witness to His love in the world. In order to fulfil this vocation, we again need His help and grace, which He unceasingly offers us. As we gratefully acknowledge all these facts, humility continues to be formed in us. Thus we willingly submit to our Father and praise His greatness and goodness.

In this way we can understand and put into practice the words of St Augustine, who said that humility is submission to the superior and that true greatness comes from this. Pride, on the other hand, exalts itself and therefore ends in humiliation (cf. Lk 14:11).

The path to humility that I have described is simple: it is a matter of becoming aware of and accepting God-given reality. In my view, it is an organic path that anyone can follow. In this way humility grows in the hidden places until it becomes a precious flower in the Lord's garden, which in turn acts as a motivation to fight with all our

strength for what God has entrusted to us and which is to be our contribution to His Kingdom. Once again, it will be the Lord who will take care of that which is beyond our strength. May He be praised in all things!

NOTE: This theme is also developed in the following talk:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SB1a3LO-ObQ>