

Pharisee and the Publican: Humility, Part 1

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Everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." Luke 18:14

Humility is an important virtue and foundation of the spiritual life and today's liturgy exhorts us to practice this virtue. In the Epistle, St. Paul speaks of the wonderful gifts of the Holy Ghost, but makes it clear that it is the Holy Ghost working these gifts in us. Without the Holy Ghost, we can do nothing. If humility is lacking, then these gifts do us no good. Likewise, if they are not gifts of God, they merit us nothing for heaven. The parable in today's Gospel urges us to practice humility by placing before us the proud Pharisee and the repentant Publican. Humility is the foundation for the great things that our Lady did: "because He has regarded the humility of His handmaid". (Luke 1:48)

Humility is particularly commended in Sacred Scriptures and our Lord Himself said: "Learn from Me because I am meek and humble of heart." (Matt 11:29) It is important for us to know about this virtue and strive to acquire it. There are four fundamental moral virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. Under temperance we find general modesty. Under general modesty we find humility.

Temperance deals with those things wherein it is most difficult to moderate: food and sensual passions. General modesty concerns lesser matters than temperance, but these too need to be regulated by a virtue. Our whole being must be regulated by virtue.

The ordinary matters addressed by general modesty can be classed into four groups. These are:

1. things relating to the mind toward some excellence, which is where humility comes in;
2. knowledge, which is regulated by studiousness;
3. words and actions, which are regulated by modesty in words and deeds; and,
4. outward show, which is regulated by modesty in dress.

Sincerely in Christ,

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