

Pharisee and the Publican: Humility, Part 2

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To understand the role of virtues, it helps to understand the passions they regulate. Looking just at the passions that deal with a difficult good, some are attractive, which leads to hope, and some are repulsive and lead to despair. The corresponding virtues to these passions are of two types: moderating and restraining, in order to control the impulse toward the object, or strengthening and urging, in order to persevere against recoil.

In the case of humility, this virtue restrains a man from being borne in an immoderate fashion towards high things relating to the mind. Magnanimity, on the other hand, strengthens the mind against despair and urges it towards these great things according to reason. Therefore, humility, like temperance, is a restraining virtue. While temperance restrains the passions of touch and sensuality, humility restrains the mind from going after high things in an inordinate fashion. Humility and magnanimity are not opposed; rather, humility controls the impulses toward a difficult object, while magnanimity urges a person on, fighting against discouragement and despair.

Through pride, we puff ourselves up, as the Pharisee did in the Gospel. Humility lets us see what we really are and to recognize Who does the good works through us. As our Savior warned, he who raises himself up through pride will be brought low by the loss of merit, while he who humbles himself will be exalted since he can acquire merits for heaven.

Sincerely in Christ,

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