

Self-Knowledge

*"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."
(Matthew 7:3-5)*

Writing of St. Francis

Blessed is the servant who does not regard himself as better when he is esteemed and extolled by men than when he is reputed as mean, simple, and despicable; for what a man is in the sight of God, so much he is, and no more. (Admonition 20)

From the Life of St. Francis

"And that he might perfectly show himself to be contemptible, and to afford to the rest an example of true confession, he was not ashamed, when he had offended in anything, to confess it when he was preaching, before all the people. Nay more, if he chanced to have any evil thought about anyone, or happened to let fall an angry word, he would straightway confess the sin to him against whom he had thought or said anything evil and beg his pardon. His conscience (witness of all innocence) guarded itself with all solicitude and did not let him rest until soothing words had healed the mental wound. Assuredly in his noteworthy deeds of every kind he craved not notoriety but profit, avoiding admiration by every means that he might never fall into vanity."
(Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano, Chapter XIX)

True self knowledge, that which comes from God, acknowledges two realities present within our soul. First, there is a deep understanding of the beauty and dignity of our soul created in the image and likeness of God. We acknowledge that, in our baptism, God dwells within our soul, filling it with supernatural riches and that we are His son or daughter. We know deeply that we are loved and have a clear knowledge of our true identity. Second, we acknowledge the presence of sinful tendencies, dispositions, and movements in our dignified soul. We know that we are flawed and have a tendency toward selfishness and sin. The presence of both the inherent greatness and riches the soul receives from God who dwells within it and the soul's deficiencies, sinful tendencies, and sin inflicted wounds are balanced and in harmony. If we focus on the first reality while ignoring the second, we can fall into presumption, arrogance, and pride. If we focus on the second while ignoring the first reality, we run the risk of despairing of the love and mercy of God. A healthy balance of both is necessary to tend toward God and His will for us.

So how do we learn to know ourselves better? We can spend time with God daily in prayer and meditation. We can frequent the Sacraments of the Church. "In His light we see light." (Psalm 36:10) As we draw closer and closer to God, He will reveal to us more clearly the deep love He has for us and the gifts He has lovingly placed within our souls as well as the areas of our hearts that need His healing or purification. This will move us to be grateful to Him, to trust and praise Him, to seek His healing, and to humble ourselves in surrendering to His will in our lives.

Make some time this month to prayerfully ask these questions:

1. Who am I really? What do I find hardest to face about myself? Bring this to Jesus in prayer and listen to what He says about this.
2. Find another section in Scripture which illustrates the Virtue of Self-Knowledge. Find another statement of Jesus or an incident in His life that illustrates this virtue. Find a place in our Rule or Constitutions that deal with the Virtue of Self-Knowledge.
3. Pray the following prayer, "Lord, help me to know, accept, and love myself. Give me the courage to increase the gifts you have given me and eradicate the weaknesses that prevent me from being all that you are calling me to be. Show me how, Lord, and grant me Your grace and Peace. Amen."
4. Pay attention to the movements of your heart. When you lose your peace and become angry, frustrated, or losing hope, stop and prayerfully ask God to reveal your heart to you. Is there something that you need to be aware of? Is there something you need to change? If so, bring that to prayer and make a resolution to follow where God is leading.

(Adapted from *Franciscan Virtues Through the Year: 52 Steps to Conversion from Saint Francis of Assisi*, written by the members of the Confraternity of Penitents.)