

The Virtue of the Love of Self

“Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:3-7)

“With our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind, with our whole strength and fortitude, with our whole understanding, with all our powers, with every effort, every affection, every feeling, every desire and wish, let us all love the Lord God Who has given and gives to each one of us our whole body, our whole soul and our whole life, Who has created, redeemed and will save us by His mercy alone, who did and does everything good for us, miserable and wretched, rotten and foul, ungrateful and evil ones. Therefore, let us desire nothing else, let us want nothing else, let nothing else please us and cause us delight except our Creator, Redeemer and Savior, the only true God Who is the fullness of good...” (Earlier Rule, Chapter XXIII)

“There was a brother called Riccercio, a noble in birth and behavior. He placed such trust in the merits of blessed Francis that he believed that anyone who enjoyed the gift of the saint’s affection would be worthy of divine grace. He therefore anxiously longed to obtain the benefit of his intimacy, but he was very fearful that the saint might discover in him some hidden fault and then he would be further away from the saint’s good will.

These deep fears tormented that brother every day, and he did not reveal his thoughts to anyone. One day, worried as usual, he approached the cell where Saint Francis was praying. The man of God knew of both his coming and his state of mind and called him kindly to himself, “My son,” he said, “let no fear or temptation disturb you anymore, for you are very dear to me, and among all those who are dearest to me I love you with a special love. Come to me confidently whenever you want and leave me freely whenever you want.” The brother was extremely shocked and overjoyed at the words of the holy father. From that time on, knowing he was loved, he grew—as he believed—in the grace of the Savior.” (The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul by Thomas of Celano, Chapter XV)

In order to understand the virtue of Love of Self, we must first understand that without God we are nothing! We cannot serve our neighbor, love others, or do anything good without loving God. We must never boast about the good God does through us as though we are responsible for it on our own.

God sent His only son to die on the cross and to rise again so that we might have eternal life. This alone teaches us that Love of Self, in its pure and most virtuous form, is never selfish. God loved us enough to die for us, so how can we not love ourselves? God made us and God only creates good, so how can we be anything but loveable? God made us and God only created

good, so how can we be anything but loveable? God leaves no room for disparaging ourselves, only for repentance for any sins committed or blunders made.

If we love ourselves, then we will automatically have humility, patience, kindness, and love for others, because God loves them too. In giving His life for us, Jesus taught us to always put others first, to never count the cost, and to love with no expectations. If you love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, put others before yourself, and deny yourself some of life's pleasures in order to help others, then you will have achieved the virtue of Love of Self in its true meaning and form.

Begin to meditate on the virtue of Love of Self. Pray "Lord, help me to understand the virtue of Self Love and where I need it in my life."

*Do I love myself? If I don't how can I learn to love myself?

*What is the difference between loving myself and being selfish and prideful of myself?

*Do I try to practice humility when it comes to criticism, knowing that I am loved by God?

*What can I change in my life to help me to have a true Love of Self that is rooted in knowing that I am loved by God and from loving God?

*Find another section in Scripture, in your Rule, Constitutions/Statutes that calls for this virtue.

*Practice the Virtue of the Love of Self this month. Find ways to practice humility or to put others before yourself. Deny yourself some simple pleasures and offer these for someone else's suffering.

*Each evening examine your day and pray, "Lord, please help me to understand the true meaning of Love of Self. I know that I am filled with pride and remiss in denying myself simple pleasures for the sake of others. I also know that sometimes I loathe myself, and I know this is wrong because you do not loathe me but love me. Help me to lower myself enough to accept your unconditional love. Grant me the grace to love myself deeply enough to put others first and to deny myself so that others may have what they need. Help me to become small, (to decrease), so that You may increase! Amen."

(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.)