

Silent Reflections
Tuesday 26 July 2022

Humility



***Humility is a strange thing. The minute you think
you've got it, you've lost it.***

(Sir Edward Hulse)

Introduction

Humility is the antithesis of pride, but we have to be careful in our definitions; true humility requires us to see ourselves as God sees us. One of the beatitudes most often misunderstood is: *Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.* Humility, like meekness, can be seen as weakness, a command to allow ourselves to be trodden on by all and sundry, and it does indeed come from the Latin word 'humus', which means rich ground. However, there is nothing weak about this kind of acceptance; Metropolitan Anthony Bloom puts it this way:

Humility is the situation of the earth. The earth is always there, always taken for granted, never remembered, always trodden on by everyone, somewhere we cast and pour out all the refuse, all we don't need. It's there, silent and accepting everything and in a miraculous way making out of all the refuse new richness in spite of corruption, transforming corruption itself into a power of life and a new possibility of creativeness, open to the sunshine, open to the rain, ready to receive any seed we sow and capable of bringing thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold out of every seed."

Henri Nouwen explains it this way:

As we look at the stars and let our minds wander into the many galaxies, we come to feel so small and insignificant that anything we do, say, or think seems completely useless. But if we look into our souls and let our minds wander into the endless galaxies of our interior lives, we become so tall and significant that everything we do, say, or think appears of great importance.

We have to keep looking both ways to remain humble and confident, humorous and serious, playful and responsible. Yes, the human person is very small and very tall. It is the tension between the two that keeps us spiritually awake.

Clearly, we neither want to be like A. A. Milne's Tigger in this caption, or like Charles Dickens' character, Uriah Heep, in David Copperfield, well known for claiming always to be 'very umble':



When I was quite a young boy,' said Uriah, 'I got to know what umbleness did, and I took to it. I ate umble pie with an appetite. I stopped at the umble point of my learning, and says I, "Hold hard!" When you offered to teach me Latin, I knew better. "People like to be above you," says father, "keep yourself down." I am very umble to the present moment, Master Copperfield, but I've got a little power!

This kind of false humility can give us an excuse for not responding to a call from God to play our part. “Oh, I could never do that, I’m not nearly clever enough, brave enough, talented enough.” Somehow, we need to steer a middle course between not puffing ourselves up, nor being so weighed down with our own failures that we are unteachable, never allowing God to walk beside us, to love us, to delight in us, to transform us into his likeness. So, here we are on the Christian tightrope again and in order to keep our balance we need to focus on a reference point. For Christians that means maintaining eye contact with Jesus, as Simon Peter found to his cost.

You may find that in any of the following passages, or images, something speaks to you in a personal way. Take it in and reflect on what God is showing you. Allow the word or image to interact with your thoughts, your hopes, your memories, your desires. In this way, you allow God's word to become a word that touches you and affects you at your deepest levels through the Holy Spirit. Those in the church might want to walk the labyrinth at some point. The final stage is to rest in God’s presence.

Richard Rohr says:

the Bible does not make transformation dependent on cleverness at all; rather, transformation is found in one of God’s favourite and most effective hiding places: humility...Such “poverty of spirit,” Jesus says, is something we seem to lose as we grow into supposed adulthood...We all need what Jesus described as the mind of a curious child...A “beginner’s mind,” which is truly open and living in the now.

Jesus sets us many examples of how this might come about. As we follow him, he encourages us to:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
(Matt 11:29-30)

In the letter to the **Philippians** (2: 3-8), Jesus’ example is held up for us to imitate:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.

Throughout the New Testament, there are many such exhortations, for example:

1 Peter 5: 5-6

And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’

Romans 12:16

Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

The Old Testament, too, is full of examples of God’s desire for us to be humble, so we can learn. Here are just two:

Psalms 25: 9

He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

Micah 6: 8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Saint John of the Cross

To be taken with love for a soul, God does not look on its greatness, but the greatness of its humility.

Teresa of Avila

We may speak of love and humility as the true flowers of spiritual growth; and they give off a wonderful scent, which benefits all those who are near...There is more value in a little study of humility and in a single act of it than in all the knowledge in the world.

In **John Bunyan's** poem, *The Valley of Humiliation*, the shepherd boy sings:

*He that is down needs fear no fall,
he that is low, no pride;
he that is humble ever shall
have God to be his guide.*

Surely here is that right kind of humility, the sort that lifts us up in God's eyes and not our own, but nevertheless gives us the confidence to keep our eyes on him and know we are loved and are precious in his sight. David Daniels described humility as 'the ability to give and receive without pride, expectation, or questioning of one's real worth and capacities.'

Points to ponder:

- What demands most of my attention and energy in my everyday life?
- When Jesus looks at me, what does he see?
- How can I ready myself to step up when God calls, allowing him to be the true judge of my worth and capacities?
- Consider the dangers of putting someone on a pedestal, for them and for you.



The higher the pedestal, the deeper the fall.

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