

Pride & Humility

We begin our little series on the seven deadly sins and corresponding virtues by looking at pride and humility.

According to the Catechism, pride is defined as "*undue self-esteem or self-love, which seeks attention and honor and sets oneself in competition with God.*" Essentially, pride is inordinate self-love. Of course, there is a natural love of self in that you were created out of love and therefore good. In short, your existence is good!

Pride, however, is an *excessive* love of self. It is a kind of idolatry where you make a god of yourself. Pride is the great sin of Lucifer the angel who wanted to become like God. Speaking of this great ambition, Isaiah 14:14 says, "*I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will be like the Most High!*"

In itself, pride is the gravest of all sins in that it fundamentally orients one against God and revolts against His law. By putting oneself in God's place or in direct competition with God, pride opens the door to all others sins. Hence, pride is the taproot of all sin.

To provide an image, think of a candy apple or a lollipop. They have a small stem, but huge heads. Prideful people have an inflated view of themselves in light of God and others. In terms of animals, a peacock is a good example of pride. It struts around with its train of tail feathers arrayed in majestic colors.

Pride manifests itself in various ways. For example, it can lead to presumption in that you believe you can do more than you think. It can also foster vanity, which is an inordinate love for the esteem of others. Furthermore, pride can lead to boasting, which is speaking always about oneself and one's greatness. There is an old joke about having a conversation with a boastful person who says, "Well, that's enough about me. Now you talk about me."

The antidote for pride is humility. The Latin *humus* means earth or ground. In Dante's *Inferno*, the proud must carry boulders on their backs so that they look at the ground. A humble person remains grounded in the truth about God and himself or herself. If a peacock is an image of pride, then a turtle is a good example of humility. It is quiet and unassuming. Of course, a golden retriever is also good example because, well, it exemplifies all the virtues.

If you struggle with pride, take courage, you are not alone! There are ways to grow in humility. First, pray for humility. Be careful, however, because God loves to answer this prayer! He will put you in situations that will humble you. Prayer itself expresses that you are not the center of the world, but rather God is. On a personal note, I have found that taking time to pray to the Child Jesus greatly helps. In meditating on the "littleness of God," I remain in awe at His extraordinary humility!

Second, do little things to grow in humility. When possible, take the lower place. Find ways to put others before yourself. If you deserve something, recommend someone else for it. Let others speak before you do. St. Thérèse's "Little Way" is about choosing the path of love at every moment. Each day she discerned where a little sacrifice of love could be made for someone else. In doing so, she put others before herself and soared in humility.

Third, learn to love little things. Take a walk and pay attention to an ant, a caterpillar, or the beautiful trees and flowers now in full bloom. Notice the great artistry of God and how much He cares for the smallest details of things.

Fourth, practice thanksgiving. Remember that everything you are and everything you have is a gift. By recognizing that all is grace, you will not only grow in gratitude, but also in humility.

Finally, turn to the Blessed Mother. She embodies humility like no one else. Take note of her words, "*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my savior. For He has looked with favor on His lowly servant*" (Lk 1:46-48). Mary never disappoints those who turn to her and ask for humility. She is, after all, the Queen of Humility!
St. Thérèse, pray for us!



Proud Peacock



Humble Golden