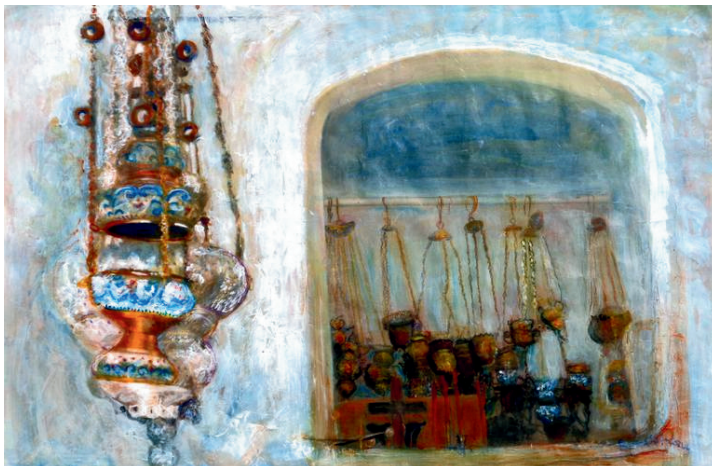


ON THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY

FROM THE HOLY FATHERS



CHAPTER 7. *Pride*

On pride

[73] Pride is a most abominable sin, but hardly anyone recognizes it since it is hidden deep in the heart. Not knowing one's self is the beginning of pride. This ignorance blinds a man, and thus he becomes full of pride. O that man would know himself! He would know his own misfortune, poverty, and wretchedness; he would never become full of pride. But man is so wretched that he does not see and know his misfortune and wretchedness.

Pride is known by its deeds as a tree is known by its fruits. But let us see what are the fruits of the bitter seed of pride:

1. A proud man seeks honor, glory, and praise by every means. He always desires to appear as something, and to direct, command, and rule others. But he is powerfully angered and embittered at whoever may prevent his desire.

2. He complains, he is displeased, and he curses when deprived of honor and leadership. "What have I done wrong? Why am I at fault? Is this what my labors and service merit?" It often drives a man to kill himself.

3. He begins labors that are beyond his strength which he is not able to manage. O man! Why do you take up burdens which you cannot bear?

4. Out of his self-will he interferes in the affairs of others. He desires to direct everyone and everywhere, though he himself does not know what he is doing, so greatly is he blinded by pride.

stumbling-block (Ps. 118:165). O Christian, love the Law of God and the temptations of the world shall not harm you.

8. Our effort and struggle against sin is powerless without the help of God. For this reason we must make an effort and pray, that the Lord help us in this so important an endeavor. The Lord helps those that take care and labor. He strengthens those that struggle and crowns the victorious.

Beloved Christians, we see the enemies of our soul that wish to destroy us not temporally, but eternally. We also see help in the struggle against them. Let us stand, then, let us stand aright and be strengthened with the power of Jesus our almighty Saviour, and let us not allow them to overpower us, that we may be crowned with the wreath of victory by the Master of the contest.

O Lord Jesus, the Victor over death and hell, help us! We can do nothing without Thee. With Thee we can do all things.



5. He boasts of himself shamelessly and exalts himself. "I did thus and so. I rendered such and such service to society." O man! You enumerate your services, but why do you not mention your shortcomings? While it is shameful for you to proclaim those, you should also be ashamed to praise yourself.

6. He looks down on and humiliates other people. "He is a base man, he is useless," and so on. O man! He is a man just as you are, for we are all men. He is a sinner, yes, but I think that you cannot deny that name either. He transgressed in something, or is a sinner, but you, too, in another way, or perhaps in the same way. *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God* (Rom. 3:23).

7. He does not submit, he does not obey his authorities and his parents. The proud have a stiff and unbending neck. They always wish to establish and execute the will of their desires.

8. The goods that they have they ascribe to themselves, to their own efforts and labors, and not to God. O man! What can you have of your own self, who came naked out of your mother's womb? What can you have should God, the source of all good, not give it to you? What can our effort and labor accomplish without His help, Who alone is able do all things, and without Whom everyone is as nothing, as a shadow without a body?

9. He greatly dislikes reproach and admonition. He thinks himself pure, though he be all sullied.

10. He is impatient, is displeased, complains, and often even curses when in destruction, in contempt, in misfortunes and calamities.

11. He displays haughtiness and is somewhat pompous, etc. in word and deed. These are the fruits of pride, hateful to God and man. The fruits which it engenders are bitter. *For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God* (Lk. 16:15). Wherefore it is also written, *For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased* (Lk. 14:11).

The virtue opposed to pride is humility. But as far as pride is loathsome and abominable, so welcome and lovely is humility to God and men. God Who is great and exalted looks on nothing so lovely as on a humble and compunctionate heart. Whence even the Most Holy Theotokos says of herself, *For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden* (Lk. 1:48).

When pride retreats from a man, humility begins to dwell in him, and the more pride is diminished, so much more does humility grow. The one gives way to the other as to its opposite. Darkness departs and light appears. Pride is darkness, but humility is light.

As we consider our own selves and come to know our misfortune and wretchedness, we shall have reason enough to be humble. We are born naked and with a cry. We live in calamity, misfortune, and sins. We die with fear, disease, and sighing. We are buried in the earth and return to the earth. There it is not evident where the rich man lies, where the poor, where the noble and where the lowly, where the master and where the servant, where the wise and where the foolish. There they are all made equal, for they all return to the earth. Why, then, should earth and corruption be conceited?

Beloved Christians! Let us know our misfortune and wretchedness, and *Humble yourselves therefore under*

the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time (I Pet. 5:6). Let us know, beloved, that we Christians are Christ's, Who is meek and humble of heart. It is a shameful thing, and very unbecoming of Christians, to be full of pride when Christ, God great and exalted, humbled Himself. It is a shameful thing for servants to be proud when their Master is humble. There is nothing as unbecoming and indecent of Christians as pride, and nothing shows a Christian as much as humility.

From humility it is known that a man is a true disciple of Jesus, meek and humble of heart. If we wish to show evidence that we are true Christians, let us learn from Christ to be humble as He Himself enjoins us, *Learn of Me; for I am meek, and lowly in heart* (Mt. 11:29). Let us engrave and deepen in our memory the saying of the Apostle now explained, *For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble* (I Pet. 5:6).



CHAPTER 8. *Sins of the tongue*

On the conduct of a pure heart

[36] Treat every man not with flattery, but simply, just as you do yourself. As you appear to him outwardly, be so inwardly as well; and what you say to him and what you have on your lips must be in your heart also. For flattery and treachery are the works of pestilent people, and the devil lives in their heart teaching them flattery and treachery so as to deceive us.

Keep, then, from treating your neighbor craftily and treacherously, lest you give place to the devil in your heart, and lest he overcome you and take you captive.

By no means offend anyone

[35] Be extremely careful not to offend anyone in word or deed, for it is a grave sin. When someone is offended, God, Who loves the man, is also offended, for there can be no offending man without offending God. Whoever sins against man, also sins against God. This is a serious matter, as you can see for yourself. And when you offend your neighbor, straightway humble yourself before him and beg forgiveness of him with humility, lest you fall under God's just condemnation.

* *Do not pry into other people's affairs*

[37] Keep from prying into other people's affairs, for such prying gives occasion for slander, judgement

III

On Humility

Not many elders today understand the Lord's love for us, and know the soul's struggle against her enemies, and that these enemies are to be overcome by Christian humility.

The Lord so loves man that He gives him the gifts of the Holy Spirit but until the soul learns to preserve grace she is much tormented.

The first year after I received the Holy Spirit, I thought to myself, 'The Lord has forgiven me my sins: grace is witness to this. What more do I need?' But that is not the way to think. Though our sins be forgiven, we must remember them and grieve over them all our lives, so as to remain contrite. I did not do this, and ceased to feel contrite, and suffered greatly from evil spirits. And I was perplexed by what was happening to me, and said to myself, 'My soul knows the Lord and His love. How is it that evil thoughts come to me?' And the Lord had pity on me, and Himself taught me the way to humble myself - 'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.' Thus is the enemy vanquished. But when my mind emerges from the fire, suggestions of passion gather strength again.

Whoever like me has lost grace, let him wrestle manfully with evil spirits. Know that you yourself are to blame: you fell into pride and vanity, and the Lord in His mercy is showing you what it means to be in the Holy Spirit and what it means to wage war against evil spirits. Thus the soul learns by experience the harm that comes of pride, and so shuns vainglory and the praises of man, and evil thoughts.

Then will the soul begin to recover her health, and learn to preserve grace. How can we tell whether the soul is well or ailing? The ailing soul is full of pride, while the soul that is well loves the humility taught her by the Holy Spirit, and if she does not know this, she reckons herself the worst of all human beings.

Though the Lord take her to heaven each day and show her all the heavenly glory in which He dwells, and the love of the Seraphim and Cherubim, and all the Saints - even then, with the knowledge of experience the humble soul will say, 'Thou, O Lord, shewest me Thy glory because Thou lovest Thy creature, but do Thou give me tears and the power to thank Thee. To Thee belongeth glory in heaven and on earth, but as for me - I must weep for my sins.' There is no other way of preserving the grace of the Holy Spirit which the Lord in His mercy gives freely.

The Lord showed great pity on me and made me understand that I must weep all my life. *Such is the way of the Lord.* And so I write now out of pity for those who, like me, are puffed up with pride, and therefore suffer. I write that they may learn humility, and find rest in God.

Some say, this was so once upon a time but now it is over and done with; but with God *nothing ever loses virtue* - it is only we who change, get worse and lose grace. But to the man who beseeches the Lord all things are given, not because we are worthy but because the Lord is merciful and loves us.

I write of this because my soul knows the Lord.

To learn Christ-like humility is a great good. To the man who knows humility life is smooth and joyous, and the heart finds all things pleasant. Only to the humble does the Lord reveal Himself in the Holy Spirit, and if we do not humble ourselves we shall not see God. Humility is the light in which we may behold the Light which is God - in the words of the Psalmist: 'In thy light shall we see light.'¹

¹ Ps. xxxvi:9.

The Lord taught me to stay my mind in hell, and not despair, and thus my soul humbles herself, but this is not yet true humility, which no words can describe. When the soul approaches the Lord she is afraid, but when she sees the Lord, the beauty of His glory fills her with ineffable joy, and in the love of God and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit the earth is quite forgot. This is the paradise of the Lord: All will live in love, and their Christ-like humility will make every man happy to see others in greater glory. The humility of Christ dwells in the lowly ones – they are glad to be the least of men. The Lord gave me understanding of this.

O all ye Saints, pray for me that my soul may learn the humility of Christ! My soul is eager for it but I cannot learn this humility, and I seek it in tears, like a lost child looking for its mother.

Where art Thou, my Lord? Thou hast hidden Thyself from my soul, and I seek Thee, weeping.

O Lord, enable me to humble myself before Thy majesty.

O Lord, to Thee belongs glory in heaven and on earth, but to me Thine insignificant creature, grant Thy humble Spirit.

I entreat Thy goodness, O Lord. Look down on me from the height of Thy glory, and give me strength to praise Thee day and night, for my soul hath loved Thee in the Holy Spirit, and I yearn after Thee, and seek Thee in tears.

O Lord, grant us Thy Holy Spirit. In Him shall we glorify Thee day and night, for our flesh is weak but Thy Spirit is hale, and giveth the soul strength to serve Thee with ease, confirming the mind in Thy love, and according it perfect rest in Thee, so that it desires no thought save of Thy love.

O merciful Lord – my frail spirit cannot approach Thee, and therefore like King Agar I cry unto Thee: Come and heal me of the wounds made by my sinful thoughts, and

I will praise Thee day and night, and preach Thee to the nations that all peoples may know Thee, that Thou art the Lord Who now as of old performeth miracles, forgiveth sins, sanctifieth and giveth life.

There is a wide difference between the simplest man who has come to know the Lord by the Holy Spirit and even a very great man ignorant of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

There is a big distinction between merely believing that God exists, seeing Him in nature or in the Scriptures, and knowing the Lord by the Holy Spirit.

The spirit of the man who has learned to know God by the Holy Spirit burns day and night with love of God, and his soul can form no earthly attachment.

The soul that has not known the sweetness of the Holy Spirit rejoices in worldly vanity and praise, or in riches or power; but the Lord is the only desire of the soul that has come to know the Lord through the Holy Spirit, and with her, riches and worldly fame count for naught.

The soul that has tasted of the Holy Spirit recognises the taste. 'O taste and see that the Lord is good,' sang the Psalmist.ⁱⁱ David's was the knowledge of experience, and to this day the Lord gives His servants to know His goodness through experience, and will so teach His servants till the end of time.

The man who has come to know God by the Holy Spirit has learned humility of Him, and become like to His Master, Christ the Son of God, and is fashioned in His image.

O Lord, vouchsafe unto us the gift of Thy holy humility.
O Lord, give us freely of Thy humble Holy Spirit, just as Thou didst freely come to save Thy people, and raise them to heaven that they might behold Thy glory.

ⁱⁱ Ps. xxxiv:8.

O Christ-like humility! I know thee but cannot attain unto thee! Thy fruits are sweet for they are not of this earth.

When the soul is downcast, how can the fire be kindled that will cause her to burn with love at all times? This fire is in God's hands, and the Lord came down upon earth to give us this fire of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the man who is learning to be humble possesses this fire, for the Lord endows the lowly soul with His grace.

Great pains are needed, and many tears must be shed, to preserve the humble spirit of Christ; but without it the light of life is extinguished and the soul dies. The body may soon be made lean by fasting but it is not easy or possible in a short space of time to subdue the soul so that she is constantly humble. For seventeen years St. Mary of Egypt wrestled with the passions, as with wild beasts, and only after that did she find peace; but her body was soon brought low – in the desert there was not even food for her to eat.

Our hearts are frozen cold and we have no understanding of Christ's humility or love. True, this humility and love are made known through the grace of the Holy Spirit, but we do not believe it possible to draw this grace to ourselves. To do so, we must desire it with our very soul. But how can I desire something of which I have no idea? All of us have some small idea of grace, and the Holy Spirit moves every soul to seek God.

O, how needful it is that we entreat the Lord to give the soul His humble Holy Spirit! The lowly soul enjoys great peace, while the proud soul is a torment to herself. The proud man does not know the love of God, and is far from Him. He is proud of being rich or learned or famous, but, alas, he is unaware of his own poverty and ruin, for he does not know God. But the man who struggles against pride, the Lord will help to overcome this passion.

The Lord said, 'Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in

heart."ⁱⁱⁱ Wherefore my soul wearies day and night, and I beseech God and all the Saints in heaven, and all you who have come to know the humility of Christ – pray for me. Pray that the lowly spirit of Christ, for which my soul weeps in longing, may descend on me. I could not do otherwise than long for this humility which my soul once knew by the Holy Spirit, but I lost this gift, and so my soul yearns after it in tears.

O Lord in Thy manifold mercy bestow on us a humble spirit, that our souls may find rest in Thee.

Most holy and gracious Mother of God, beseech God to make us lowly in spirit.

All ye Saints who dwell in heaven
and behold the glory of the Lord,
and your spirits rejoice—
pray that we also may be with you,
for my soul, too, would fain see the Lord,
and yearns after Him humbly,
knowing herself unworthy of such blessing.

O merciful Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit
teach us Thy humility.

Pride prevents the soul from setting out upon the path of faith. To the unbeliever I would give this counsel: Let him say, 'Lord, if Thou dost exist, then enlighten me and I will serve Thee with all my heart and soul.' And for such humility of mind and readiness to serve God, the Lord will of a certainty enlighten him. But do not say, 'If Thou dost exist, then punish me,' because if punishment should come, it may be that you would not find strength to thank God and offer repentance.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matt. xi:29.

And when the Lord enlightens you, your soul will feel the Lord, will feel that the Lord has forgiven you and loves you. And this you will come to know of experience, and the grace of the Holy Spirit will bear witness in your soul to your salvation, and you will want to cry aloud to the whole world, 'How greatly the Lord loveth us!'

Before he knew the Lord, Paul the Apostle persecuted Him, but when he came to know Him he travelled the length and breadth of the earth, preaching Christ.

Unless the Lord grant him knowledge in the Holy Spirit, man cannot know how greatly He loves us, for there is no earthly science can teach the human mind of the love the Lord has for men.

But to be saved, we must humble ourselves, for the proud man even were he to be set down in paradise would not find peace there but would be discontent, and say, 'Why am I not up in the front rank?' But the humble soul is filled with love and does not seek to be in the foreground. The humble soul wishes good to all men, and in all things is content.

The vainglorious either fear evil spirits or themselves resemble evil spirits. But we should not fear evil spirits – we should fear vainglory and pride, for through them is grace lost.

The man who converses with evil spirits defiles his mind, while the man who dwells in prayer is enlightened of the Lord.

The Lord loves us greatly, yet we fall because we lack humility. If we would preserve humility, we must mortify the flesh and assume the Spirit of Christ. The Saints waged bitter war against evil spirits and conquered them through humility, prayer and fasting.

He who has humbled himself has vanquished his foes.

→ What must we do to have peace in soul and body?

We must love every man like our own self, and at all times be prepared for death. When the soul is mindful of

death she becomes humble and yields herself up to the will of God, desiring to live in peace and love with all men.

When the peace of Christ enters the soul, then is she glad to sit like Job among the ashes and behold others in glory; then does the soul rejoice that she is worse than everyone else. This mystery of Christ-like humility is a great mystery, impossible to unfold. From love the soul wishes every human being more good than she wishes for herself, and delights when she sees others happier, and grieves to see them suffering.

O pray for me all ye Saints and all ye peoples,
that Christ's holy humility may come to me!

The Lord loves mankind but He sends affliction that we may perceive our weakness and humble ourselves, and for this humility receive the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit all things are good, all things are joyful, all things are well.

One man may suffer much from poverty and sickness but does not humble himself and so his suffering profits him nothing. Whereas another who humbles himself will be content with every kind of fate, since the Lord is his riches and his joy, and all men will wonder at the beauty of his soul.

You may say, My troubles are manifold. But I tell you, or, better, the Lord Himself says, 'Humble thyself, and thou wilt see, even to thine own astonishment, that thine adversities will be transformed into peace, and thou wilt exclaim: "Wherefore did I so torment and fret myself!" ' But now you rejoice, for you have humbled yourself, and the grace of God has come to you. Now were you to sit alone in poverty, your joy will not forsake you, inasmuch as in your soul is that peace of which the Lord said, 'My peace I give unto you.'^{iv} Thus to every humble soul the Lord gives peace.

^{iv} John xiv:27.

The soul of the humble man is like the sea. Throw a stone into the sea – for a moment it will ruffle the surface, and then sink to the bottom.

Thus do afflictions disappear down in the heart of the humble man because the strength of the Lord is with him.

Where is thy habitation, O humble soul? And who dwells in thee; and to what shall I liken thee?

Thou burnest bright like the sun, and art not consumed, but with thy warmth thou givest warmth to all.

The earth is thine, for the meek shall inherit the earth, said the Lord.^v

Thou art like a flowering garden. In the heart of the garden lies a fair dwelling wherein it pleases the Lord to take up His abode.

Thou art the beloved of heaven and earth.

The Apostles, Prophets, Prelates and holy Fathers love thee.

The Angels, the Seraphim and Cherubim love thee.

The most holy Mother of the Lord loves thee, O humble soul.

The Lord loves thee, and in thee does He rejoice.

The Lord does not manifest Himself to the proud soul. All the books in the world will not help the proud soul to know the Lord, for her pride will not make way for the grace of the Holy Spirit, and God is known only through the Holy Spirit.

Enlightened by baptism, people believe in God. But there are some who even know Him. To believe in God is good but it is more blessed to know God. Nevertheless, those who believe are blessed, too, as the Lord said to Thomas, one of the twelve: 'Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.'^{vi}

If we were humble, the Lord in His love would shew us

^v Matt. v:5.

^{vi} John xx:29.

all things, would reveal to us all mysteries, but our trouble is that we are not humble. We puff ourselves up and boast over trifles, and so make both ourselves and others unhappy.

The Lord, though He is merciful, oppresses the soul with hunger on account of her pride, and withholds grace from her until she has learned humility. I was perishing from my sins, and would long ago have been in hell, had not the Lord and His most holy and blessed Mother taken pity on me. O, her quiet, gentle voice! A voice from heaven, the like of which we shall never hear on earth! And so now in tears I write of the Lord of Mercy, as He were my own Father. It is sweet for the soul to be with the Lord: Adam tasted the sweetness of this bliss in paradise when he saw the Lord with open eyes, and we feel in our souls that He is with us according to His promise: 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'^{vii}

The Lord is with us. What more could we desire? The Lord created man that we might live and bask in Him for ever – that we might be with Him and in Him. And the Lord desires to be with us Himself, and in us. The Lord is our joy and gladness, and when pride causes us to withdraw from Him, it means that of our own accord we deliver ourselves up to suffering. Anguish of heart, dejection and evil thoughts lacerate us.

O Lord, set us right, as a tender mother corrects her little children. Give every soul to know the joy of Thy coming, the power of Thy help. Refresh the suffering souls of Thy people, and teach us all to know Thee in the Holy Spirit. The soul of man languishes on earth, O Lord, unable to find strength in Thee through the mind because she does not know Thee and Thy goodness. The cares of this world overshadow our minds, and we cannot comprehend the fulness of Thy love.

^{vii} Matt. xxviii:20.

Do Thou enlighten us.
To Thy compassion all things are possible.
Thou didst proclaim in Thy Holy Gospel
that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God . . .
and shall live.^{viii.}

Make our dead souls to hear Thy voice this day,
and come to life.
Tell the world, O Lord: 'The sins of all men are forgiven,'
and they will be forgiven.
Hallow us, O Lord,
and all men will be made holy by Thy Spirit,
and all Thy peoples will glorify Thee on earth,
and Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven,
for to Thee all things are possible.

The proud man fears obloquy, while the humble man cares nothing. He who has acquired Christ-like humility will ever upbraid himself, and it rejoices him to be abused, and grieves him to be acclaimed. But this humility is still only elementary – when the soul comes to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit, how humble and meek He is, she sees herself as the worst of all sinners, and is happy to sit in shabby raiment in the ashes like Job, while she beholds other men in the Holy Spirit shining in the likeness of Christ.

May the Merciful Lord give all men to savour Christ's humility which passes description. The soul will then know no further desire but will live for ever in humility, love and lowliness.

My soul yearns after Thee, O Lord: Thou hast concealed Thy countenance from me, and I am troubled. My soul aches to behold Thee afresh, for Thou hast drawn my soul to Thee. Hadst Thou, O Lord, not drawn me by Thy grace, I could not thus yearn after Thee, and seek Thee with tears.

How should a man seek that which he has not known, which he has not lost?

^{viii.} John v:25.

When I lived in the world I would think of Thee – though not all the time – but now my spirit burns till I weep with desire to see Thee, my Light.

Thou hast taught me by Thy tender mercy. Thou hast hid Thyself from me that my soul learn humility, for without humility grace is not preserved in the soul, and weariness and despair oppress the soul. But when the soul has learned humility, neither despair nor affliction can approach, because the Spirit of God rejoices her and she is glad.

My heart is heavy for poor folk who do not know God. They take pride in being able to fly; but there is nothing wonderful in that – birds fly and glorify God. Yet man, God's creation, forsakes his Creator. But consider – how will you stand on the Day of Judgment? Whither will you flee, and where will you hide from the Face of God?

I pray God constantly for you, that you may all be saved and rejoice eternally with the Angels and Saints. And of you I beg this: Repent and humble yourselves, make glad the Lord Who awaits you with longing and mercy. The Lord causes the soul whom He cherishes to grieve for mankind, and so pray with tears; and my soul aches, and I pray much for you.

Glory be to the Lord and to His compassion for that by the Holy Spirit He maketh Himself manifest to us His sinful servants, and the soul knows Him better than her own father, in that we see our fathers from without but the Holy Spirit permeates the whole soul, and the mind and body.

Blessed is the humble soul: she is beloved of the Lord.

All heaven and earth exalt the humble Saints, and the Lord grants them the glory of being with Him. 'Where I am, there shall also my servant be.'^{ix.}

The humility of the Mother of God is greater than any, wherefore all generations on earth exalt her, and all the

^{ix.} John xii:26.

heavenly hosts serve her; and this His Mother the Lord has given us to intercede for us and be our help.

There is no better way than to live in humility and love. The soul then knows a great peace within her, and will not set herself above her neighbour. If we love our enemies, there will be no place in our souls for pride, for in Christ-like love no one ranks above another. Pride like a burning fire consumes all that is good, whereas the humility of Christ passes description and is sweet. Did men but know this, the whole world would be apprenticed to this science. Day and night, all my life long, have I striven after humility, yet am I not able to prevail. My soul ever reflects: I have not attained to that which I desire, I cannot rest, but I humbly entreat you, brethren, you who know the love of Christ – pray for me, that I may be delivered from the spirit of pride, that the humility of Christ take up her abode in me.

There are many kinds of humility. One man is obedient, and has nothing but blame for himself; and this is humility. Another repents him of his sins and considers himself loathsome in the sight of God – and that is humility. But there is still another humility in the man who has known the Lord in the Holy Spirit. He who has known the Lord in the Holy Spirit has a different understanding and a different perception.

When the soul by the Holy Spirit sees the Lord, how meek and lowly He is, she humbles herself throughly. And this is an especial humility. No one can describe it, and it is made known only through the Holy Spirit. And were men to understand through the Holy Spirit what a Lord is ours, all would be transformed – the rich would despise their riches, scholars their learning, and rulers their glory and power. Every man would humble himself and live in profound peace and love, and there would be great joy on earth.

When the soul has given herself up to the will of God, the

mind then contains naught save God, and the soul stands before God with a pure mind.

O Lord, teach us by Thy Holy Spirit to be obedient and sober.

Give us Adam's spirit of repentance.

Give us tears to weep for our sins.

Give us to praise and thank Thee world without end.

Thou didst give us Thy most holy Body and Blood, that we might live with Thee for all eternity, and be where Thou art, and behold Thy glory.

O Lord, grant all the peoples of the earth to know how greatly thou lovest us, and the wondrous life Thou dost prepare for them that believe on Thee.



CHAPTER FOUR

Combating Pride

Be in the battle, and fight well

Geronda, I think that if I change my obedience and stop chanting and making icons, I will then stop being proud and constantly falling into temptations.

– Even if you were to abandon chanting or making icons, unless you come to abhor vainglory, you will make even more mistakes. But even the thought of abandoning your obediences contains pride, much more pride in fact, because in reality you want to leave these obediences so that your ego is not bruised.

– Geronda, when I am doing some work and see that it makes me prideful, isn't it better that I not do it?

– If they tell you to do some task, you should go and do it, but be careful not to fall; and if you slip and fall, get up. Understand that you slipped because you were not watchful and, next time, if they tell you to go again, be careful not to slip and fall again. You must not refrain from going just because you fell the first time! It is, of course, different if they tell you, "Don't go because you fell the previous time." In that case you will not go. Do

you understand? If they tell you to do some task, do it, but try to do it well and humbly. To not do anything in order to avoid becoming prideful makes things worse. It is like refraining from the battle just so you won't get wounded. The goal is to remain in the battle and to make sure you fight well; otherwise, you become useless.

Pride can be crushed with the help of others

– Geronda, I get upset when the Sisters make some sort of comment about me.

– You have pride and that is why you get upset. Pride can be crushed with the help of another Sister when you give her the right to criticise you and accept her criticism with humility. This is how one's soul becomes spotlessly clean.

Since it is difficult for one to discern his prideful mindset on his own, he must accept others as if they were his doctors and take all the medicine they give him in order to be delivered from that passion. Each one of us carries medicine for others in our pocket: with pain and love, the good people counsel those that are sick, while evil people censure them with evilness and passion – and what's more, they often prove to be better doctors than the first because they're more aggressive with the scalpel.

– Geronda, I am not very bright and many times, I do not understand why I'm being censured.

– It is better to say, "I am most competent, but I have no humility." Instead, you try to justify yourself when you are censured for your error. How will you ever attain to the level of taking upon yourself the responsibility for a fault when you have not erred and yet, are criticised? The

person who justifies himself when people reprove him is constantly closing the door to humility. The person who takes full responsibility for his mistake is humbled and bathed by the Grace of God.

– Geronda, I think that I am not trying to prove that I am right, but rather that I am trying to explain that it is a matter of misunderstanding.

– I have noticed that you have a hidden pride that expresses itself in justification. You should try not to justify yourself, no matter what they tell you; make a sincere prostration of acknowledgment and that will be enough. By saying *evlogison*¹ with sincere repentance, pride is severed.

– Geronda, today, a child in the guests' quarters broke something. His mother told him to apologise, "Say, you're sorry," but the child kept retorting, "My bones hurt" and would not apologise. Why is it that some people have such a hard time saying, *evlogison*?

– It is pride that does not allow a person to say *evlogison*.

*The spiritual ... splitting of the atom(o)*²

– Geronda, how can I get rid of the exaggerated opinion I have of myself?

– If you look within and come to know your own self, you will see so much ugliness that you will be repulsed.

1. The Greek term *evlogison* (εὐλόγησον), in the imperative mood, which literally means "bless", means "forgive me" in the present context.

2. *Atomo* in Greek means an individual. A play of the words *atom* and *atomo* (an individual).

o If a person does not come to know himself in order to be humbled naturally, then, for him, humility cannot become a state of being that will secure divine Grace within himself. Then, the devil becomes capable of destroying all the years of his life – even if God should give him the many years of Methuselah³ – playing that game of foolish nonsense, wherein the devil will start off by giving him the prideful thought that he is someone significant, followed by the humble thought that he is insignificant. In this way, the devil scores a point and then the person scores a point, and back and forth it goes, forever.

o – I notice, Geronda, that all the Sisters have surpassed me in virtue, even the younger ones.

o – Since you have not humbled yourself, you have been humbled by others. Do you know what they do when they want to launch a rocket into outer space? They start counting backwards: "ten, nine, eight, seven ... one, zero!" As soon as they come to zero, the rocket takes off. Now that you have come down to zero, you will also be launched and go very far. Didn't you study physics?

o – Yes, Geronda.

o – Well, now is the time to learn the physics of metaphysics, in order to learn how the spiritual splitting of your own *atom(o)* (your own self) will take place.

o – How will it happen, Geronda?

o – When you concern yourself with your own *atomo* (entity) and come to know yourself, you will be humbled, and that is when the spiritual splitting of your *atom(o)* will take place; spiritual power will be released and you

3. Methuselah (Old Testament): a patriarch (grandfather of Noah) who lived 969 years.

will be launched into outer space. This is the only way to enter the spiritual orbit; otherwise you will remain in the worldly orbit.

There is no benefit in researching the whole world, if you haven't researched your own inner world. If one can first know his own inner world, that is, his own self, his own *atomo*, afterwards it will be easier to know not only the whole world, but outer space, as well. When one knows his own *atomo*, his own self, then the splitting of his *atomo* takes place automatically, allowing him to move in the spiritual orbit, beyond the attraction of the earth's gravity, beyond the attractions of this world. While living on earth, one can live without being attracted by sin and generally, by the desires of the world.

– Geronda, when pride remains, does this mean that one has not come to a proper understanding of his own self?

– Yes, the splitting of his own *atom(o)* has not yet taken place. Do you understand?

– In other words, Geronda, it all comes back to humility.

– Exactly! The person who has pride has not yet come to know his true self. Pride is dispelled when one knows his own self. The true recognition of the self is everything. There can be no humility without this recognition. And when one humbly recognises himself for who he really is, he is then also recognised by others.

– Geronda, what happens if there is recognition but no humility?

– Then there is no good disposition; there is no *philotimo*.

High position and humble disposition

– Geronda, is there pride in me?

– Well, yes, there is a little pride. At least we should have normal pride, as much as the law permits...

– Geronda, is there such a thing as “normal” pride?

– Look, let me explain: If one has certain gifts, knowledge, experience, and so forth, then he is somewhat justified by those extenuating circumstances in having a little pride. Certainly not that even that pride is a good thing, but it is justifiable to a degree. But one who has no such gifts or knowledge cannot be justified in being prideful; he must be humble. If such a person is prideful, then he is entirely out of line. You see, there might be a nurse who may have a prideful thought simply for having given an injection of penicillin to a patient and seeing his fever drop, whereas Fleming,⁴ the man who discovered penicillin and helped so many people, was a humble man. After his discovery, Fleming travelled to America. As the people were applauding, he was applauding too. At one point he asked, “What is going on? Who are we applauding?” “We are applauding you!” he was told. He was totally taken aback, for he was not even aware that he was the centre of attention! So, my point is that the man who discovered penicillin did not allow himself to become prideful, while a nurse who gave an injection of penicillin did. This is why Saint Basil the Great says, “*It is most important for man to have a high position and a humble disposition.*”⁵ This is of great value and is rewarded by God.

4. Alexander Fleming (1881–1955): A Scottish scientist who discovered penicillin, the first antibiotic. In 1945, he shared the Nobel Prize for medicine.

5. The quotation was not located.

I often see humility in high ranking officials and pride in simple policemen. Some time ago a subordinate official of a prefecture had come to the Kalyvi with a very boastful air, going on and on about himself, "I am this... I am that...!" Even if he were the chief of police, he would not have spoken like that. Pride is a terrible vice! And others with great wealth, with high positions, with extraordinary gifts and talents, have such humility, such simplicity! They feel as though they possess nothing. High ranking military officers do not wear their uniforms in order to avoid recognition and honours. I remember a general who was a much-decorated war veteran, who, when he had to participate in a parade, would remark, "Now I have to load myself down with all those medals..." And there was another army officer who wouldn't take off his uniform for the sake of showing off his one and only stripe. He even had a wider stripe made for his uniform – as wide as was allowed by the army regulations. Ah, the poor people!

– Geronda, when one has a humble position and is prideful, does it indicate that he is a fool?

– Yes it does, and not only once, but many times over!

Don't claim as your own what God has given you

– Geronda, I feel prideful for both the physical capabilities and the spiritual gifts which I think are my own.

– Why should you feel prideful? Did you "*make heaven and earth?*"⁶ Be careful, don't claim as your own what God has given you, and don't claim to have whatever

6. 2 Kg 19:15; Neh 9:6; Isa 37:16. "*Thou hast made heaven and earth.*"

you lack. Tell yourself, "Because I was weak, God has given me some gifts, otherwise I would have worried and been wretched. What I have to do now is utilise these gifts towards spiritual enrichment. Glory be to You, my Lord! Thank You for taking pity on me and helping me." You consider as your own all the gifts you have received – but are they really yours? "*What hast thou that thou did not receive?*"⁷ This is where cleverness is needed; this is where the mind must work and understand that all gifts are from God. If the Grace of God abandons us for just a little bit, we will be capable of doing nothing. Things are very simple. Let's say that one has certain talents of which he is proud. He must reason them out: Where did he get them from? God gave them to him. What did he do? Nothing. For example, God gives one a little extra brain power, making him capable of running a big business and therefore, living comfortably. Should he be prideful for having achieved this? No, for if God were to abandon him for even a little while, he might become bankrupt and go to prison.

▶ In any case, he who has talents, but lacks humility and troubles his neighbour with his provocative behaviour, compels Christ to take the small screwdriver and loosen his screws a bit, in order to humble him against his will. Let's say that someone wants to dig a large boulder out of the ground and is struggling with it because he lacks the ingenuity to figure out a way to move it. A smarter fellow approaches him and says, "You foolish man, don't you know how to remove that rock?" So, he takes a long crowbar, makes into a lever and easily removes the rock.

7. 1 Cor 4:7.

Well, since he behaves like that, isn't it justifiable that God takes the screwdriver and loosens his brains a little? Some people who are great orators sometimes suffer great lapses of memory and are not even able to say one word! This is how they are humbled. If God constantly allowed one to be a great orator, and he then became very prideful about that, what would happen to him? It seems that God finds a way to put the brakes on each person so that he may not be harmed.

We must be very careful not to claim the talents given to us by God as our own. We ought to thank God for them, and be concerned that we utilise them to their full extent. At the same time, we should feel sorrow for others who have not received such gifts from God, and pray for them. And when we see a person who is lacking in something, we should say to ourselves, "If that person had the gifts God has given to me, he would now be a saint, whereas I have not fully utilised them and have furthermore, wronged God by claiming as my own what He has given me." God, of course, does not worry when a person claims His gifts as his own, but He will not give him any more gifts in order not to harm him. However, if one acts simply and humbly, knowing that his gifts and talents belong to God, then God will surely give him even more talents.

We make ourselves miserable when we are prideful, not only because we divest ourselves of the gifts given to us by God, but also because we make God feel sorrow and pain for us as He looks upon our wretchedness. For although He has an abundance of wealth to bestow upon us, He does not give it to us in order not to harm us. What is the reason for this? If He gives us some gift, we look

down at others as if they were ants, and we trouble them with our arrogant and prideful behaviour. If He does not give us any gifts, we become despondent and hopeless. In which case, God Himself says, "If I give them some gifts, they become prideful, harming themselves and behaving arrogantly towards others. If I do not give them any talents, they are troubled and tormented. Even I do not know what to do."

We should not only thank God for the gifts He has given us, but also for making us as human beings. He is the Creator, after all, and He could have made us into snakes or scorpions, turtles or mules or donkeys. We should say, "God could have made me into a mule in the hands of an indiscreet owner who would have loaded me down with a hundred and fifty kilos and beat me mercilessly, but He didn't. He could have made me a snake or a scorpion, but He didn't. He could have made me a turtle, a pig, a frog, a mosquito, a fly, whatever, but He didn't. What did He make me? He made me a human being. Have I met and fulfilled all the things that God has granted to me? No." If one does not examine things in this manner – although he may appear to be just to others – he is, in reality, the most unjust person in the world, because he does not wrong other people, but God Himself, Who gave him so many gifts. But when he does examine things in this manner, even if he should attain to spiritual heights and perform thousands of miracles each day, he does not allow himself to imagine that he has achieved anything, because he attributes everything to God, and he constantly measures himself as to whether he has fully responded to all that God has given him. And then, from this life, one Grace succeeds another

and another, making one graceful, because humility has become a permanent state of being for him. And when one attributes everything to God and becomes a grateful servant of God, he will hear in the other life, "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things.*"⁸

PART THREE

CONDEMNATION, THE GREAT INJUSTICE

"Only God judges justly, because only He knows our hearts. We, ignorant as we are of God's righteous judgment, judge others by their appearance, which is why we misjudge and wrong them."

8. Mt 25:21, 25:23

dispassion, said St John Klimakos;¹ and, according to St Basil the Great, the fuel of humility is gentleness.² It is this that gives man constancy, so that he is always the same whether circumstances and thoughts are pleasant or unpleasant. He is indifferent to both honour and dishonour, joyfully accepting things sweet and painful, and remaining unperturbed.

In this he is unlike the virgin about whom St Antony the Great speaks.³ One day, while St Antony was sitting with a certain Abba, a virgin came up and said to the Elder: 'Abba, I fast six days of the week and I repeat by heart portions of the Old and New Testaments daily.' To which the Elder replied: 'Does poverty mean the same to you as abundance?' 'No', she answered. 'Or dishonour the same as praise?' 'No, Abba.' 'Are your enemies the same for you as your friends?' 'No', she replied. At that the wise Elder said to her: 'Go, get to work, you have accomplished nothing.' And he was justified in speaking like this. For if she fasted so strictly as to eat only once a week, and then very little, should she not have regarded poverty in the same way as abundance? And if she repeated passages from the Old and New Testaments daily, should she not also have learnt humility? And since she had surrendered everything worldly, should she not have considered all people to be her friends? And if she did still have enemies, could she not learn to treat them as friends after so much ascetic effort? The Elder was quite right when he said, 'You have accomplished nothing.'

Indeed, I would add that such a person deserves severe condemnation. It is as St John Chrysostom said with regard to the five foolish virgins:⁴ they had the strength to practise the more difficult form of asceticism—the virginity which is beyond nature—but not to perform what is less difficult—acts of mercy—though pagans and non-believers perform such acts as something natural. So with this virgin: because she did not know what was really needed, she laboured in vain. As the Lord said: 'All this you should have done, without neglecting the rest' (Matt. 23 : 23). Ascetic practice is a good thing, but only when done with the right goal in mind. We ought to think of it not as the real task, but as a preparation for the real task;

¹ *Ladder*, Step 4 (709D; E.T., p. 87).

² Cf. *Sermon on the Renunciation of the World* 10 (P.G. xxxi, 648b).

³ Paul Evergetinos, *Collection* III, xxix, 3, §4; cf. above, p. 208.

⁴ *Homilies on Matthew* 78, 1 (P.G. lviii, 711).

not as the fruit, but as the earth that can, with time, labour and the help of God, bear trees from which the fruit will come—the fruit that is purity of intellect and union with God. To Him be glory throughout the ages. Amen.

From the *Philokalia*, vol. 3, Faber and Faber

X
HUMILITY

The truly humble man never ceases to reproach himself, even when the whole world attacks and insults him. He acts in this way, not simply in order to attain salvation as it were passively by enduring with patience whatever befalls him, but in order to press forward actively and deliberately to embrace the sufferings of Christ. From these sufferings he learns the greatest of all the virtues, humility: the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, the gateway to the kingdom of heaven, that is to say, to dispassion. He who passes through this gateway comes to God; but without humility his road is full of pain and his effort useless. Humility bestows complete repose upon whoever possesses it in his heart, because he has Christ dwelling within him. Through it grace remains with him and God's gifts are preserved. It is the offspring of many different virtues: of obedience, patient endurance, shedding of possessions, poverty, fear of God, spiritual knowledge and others as well. But above all it is the offspring of discrimination, the virtue that illumines the farthest reaches of the intellect. Yet let no one think that it is a simple, casual matter to become humble. It is something beyond our natural powers; and it is almost true to say that the more a person is gifted, the harder it is for him to attain humility. It presupposes great judgment and endurance in the face of the trials and evil spirits that oppose us. For humility slips through all their snares.

Humility is also the offspring of spiritual knowledge, and such knowledge is born of trials and temptations. To the man who knows himself is given the knowledge of all things; and to the man who submits to God, all things will be subject when humility reigns in his members. For it is precisely through undergoing many trials and temptations, and through patiently enduring them, that a man

acquires experience; and as a result he comes to know both his own weakness and the power of God. In becoming aware of his own weakness and ignorance, he recognizes that he has now learned what once he did not know; and this allows him to see that just as he used not to know these things, and was unaware that he did not know, so there are many other things which he may later be able to learn. St Basil the Great observes in this connection that unless one tastes something one is unaware of what one is missing. But he who has tasted spiritual knowledge knows at least to some extent that he is ignorant, and so his knowledge becomes for him a source of humility. Again, he who knows that he is a mutable creature will never maintain a high opinion of himself; he will recognize that anything he may have belongs to his Creator. You do not praise a pot on the grounds that it has made itself useful; you praise its maker. And when it is broken, you blame whoever broke it, not its maker.

Yet if the vessel of which we are speaking is endowed with intelligence, then necessarily it will possess free will. Whatever is good in it comes from its Creator, and He is also the cause of its being made; but its fall or deviation will depend upon how it exercises its own free will. If you do not deviate, God in His grace will grant you the seal of His approval; but if you give ear to the serpent's evil counsel, disapprobation will be your lot. Approval and gratitude, however, are due not to the man who receives the gifts but to Him who bestows them. Yet by grace he who receives a gift may deserve approval because by his own choice he accepted what he did not have or, rather, because he is grateful to his Benefactor. And if he is not grateful, not only does he forfeit all approval, but he is self-condemned for his ingratitude as well. Yet no one, I trust, is so shameless as to claim that the gift was not freely bestowed on him and to pretend in his iniquity that he deserves praise, calmly puffing himself up and condemning those who are apparently not like him, on the grounds that he himself has conferred on himself the wealth he thinks he possesses, and has not received it by God's grace. Should such a person thank the Giver, he does so in the same way as the Pharisee in the Gospel, and says to himself, 'I thank Thee, O God, that I am not like other men' (Luke 18 : 11). The Evangelist—or, rather, God, who knows men's hearts—was right to say that he spoke 'to himself', for the Pharisee was not speaking to God. Even though orally he did seem to be speaking to God, yet God who knew his

self-applauding soul says that he stood and prayed not to God but to himself.

The fact that the Scriptures often make use of identical or very similar phrases is due, says St John Chrysostom, not to repetitiveness or prolixity, but to the desire to imprint what is said on the heart of the reader. In the ardour of his writing the psalmist did not want to stop, as do those who have not tasted the sweetness of his words and who in their listlessness trample them underfoot so as to be freed from the weight of them. Will such a person ever reap any profit from Holy Scripture? Does he not simply earn condemnation and a darkening of his intellect by opening the door to the demons who are attacking him?

As the Lord has said: 'If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?' (Luke 23 : 31); and again: 'If the righteous man is only just saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?' (1 Pet. 4 : 18). The demons attack even those whose intellect, immaterial and formless, is concentrated entirely on the remembrance of God; and, unless God assisted them on account of their humility, their prayer would not mount to heaven but would fall back empty. What then will be our lot, abject as we are? We do not even open our lips and speak into the air, so that at the last God may have mercy on us, descending to the level of our ignorance and weakness because we have shown gratitude to Him.

As for whether or not the demons attack even the perfect in this world, let us hear what St Makarios says:¹ 'No one becomes perfect in this present age; for if they did, then what is given here would not be simply a pledge of the blessings held in store but their full realization.' He adduces in testimony one of the brethren who was praying with several others and who was suddenly snatched up mentally to heaven and saw the heavenly Jerusalem and the tabernacles of the saints.² When he returned to his habitual state, however, he fell from virtue and ended up by being completely destroyed; for he thought he had achieved something and did not realize that, being unworthy and only dust by nature, he was that much the more in debt for having been privileged to ascend to such a height. St Makarios also says that he had known many men, and from his experience had come to

¹ *Homilies* (collection II), VIII, 5; cf. below, pp. 327–8.

² Cf. pp. 175, 321.

recognize without any doubt that no one in this world is perfect: even if he becomes altogether immaterial and is almost one with God, yet sin pursues him and will not disappear completely before his death.

Evagrius the Solitary has recounted how a certain monk was praying when, for his benefit and for that of many others, God allowed the demons to take him by his hands and feet and throw him in the air; and so that his body would not be hurt when he fell to the earth, they caught him in a rush-mat. This they did for a long time, but were unable to distract his intellect from heaven.¹ How would such a man even perceive what he was eating? When would he have need of psalmody or reading? But we have need of them because of the weakness of our intellect, though even in this way we fail to concentrate. Alas, such a holy man suffered attacks from the demons, yet we do not worry at all about their assaults. The saints are protected by their humility from the snares of the devil, while we in our ignorance are puffed up. It is indeed a sign of great ignorance for someone to be self-elated about what is not his. For 'what do you have which you did not receive', either freely from God or through the prayers of others? 'Now if you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it' (1 Cor. 4 : 7), but had achieved it yourself? So Abba Cassian puts it.²

Humility, then, is born from spiritual knowledge, and itself gives birth to discrimination; while from discrimination comes the spiritual insight which the prophet calls 'counsel' (Isa. 11 : 2). By means of such insight we see things according to their true nature, and the intellect dies to the world because it now contemplates the creations of God. To Him be glory throughout the ages. Amen.

XI DISCRIMINATION

It is excellent to seek advice about everything, but only from those with experience. It is dangerous to ask questions of the inexperienced, because they do not possess discrimination. Discrimination

¹ *On Prayer* 111 (*The Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 68).

² John Cassian, *Institutes* XII, 10; *The Philokalia*, vol. i, p. 93.

knows when the time is ripe, what means to employ, the inner state of the questioner, what level he has reached, his strength, his degree of spiritual knowledge and his intention, as well as God's purpose and the meaning of each verse of Holy Scripture, and much else besides. Hence he who lacks discrimination may exert himself enormously, but he cannot achieve anything; while the person who possesses it is a guide to the blind and a light to those in darkness (cf. Rom. 2 : 19). We should refer everything to such a person and accept whatever he says, even if because of our inexperience we do not see its import as well as we would like. Indeed, he who has discrimination is to be recognized in particular from the fact that he is able to communicate the sense of what he says even to those who do not want to know it. For the Spirit searches things out; and God's presence has the power to persuade even an unwilling intellect to believe. This is what happened in the case of Jonah (cf. Jonah 1 : 3), Zacharias (cf. Luke 1 : 18) and the monk David, once a brigand, whom the angel prevented from saying anything except the psalms that he recited according to his rule of prayer.

If in this present generation no one possesses discrimination, it is because no one has the humility that engenders it. We should therefore pray fervently about everything we do, as St James counsels (cf. Jas. 5 : 16). For even if we lack holy hands, that is, if we lack purity of soul and body, we should at least strive to be without rancour and evil thoughts. For St Paul tells us to 'lift up holy hands without anger and without quarrelling' (1 Tim. 2 : 8). If we think that something is in accordance with God's will, we should do it dispassionately; and even if it is not such a very good thing, what we do will be counted to our credit by God's grace, because of our perplexity and the fact that we do it with God in mind. Even if we do God's will when passion is still present, the consequences will be as stated. This is inevitably so, simply because of God's goodness. But where our own will is involved, and not God's, there self-inflation is present as well, and God does not approve; nor does He reveal His will to us then, lest we should know what it is and still not do it, and thereby incur greater condemnation. For whether God gives us something or withholds it from us, He acts for our good, even if we, like children, are unaware of this. He does not send down His Holy Spirit to someone who has not purified himself from the passions through the practice of the virtues that pertain both to body and to

with you. So as you go where fright will lay hold of you, put on the armor of prayer, and when you reach the spot, stretch out your hands and flog your enemies with the name of Jesus, since there is no stronger weapon in heaven or on earth. And when you drive the fear away, give praise to the God Who has delivered you, and He will protect you for all eternity, provided you remain grateful. Just as one morsel will not fill your stomach, so you will not defeat fear in one move. It will fade in proportion to your mourning and the less we mourn the greater will be our cowardice.

"My hair and my flesh shuddered" (Job 4:15). These were the words of Eliphaz when he was talking about the cunning of this demon. Fear starts sometimes in the soul, sometimes in the body, and the one communicates the weakness to the other. But if your soul is unafraid even when the body is terrified, you are close to being healed.⁷⁹ However, it is barrenness of soul, not the darkness or the emptiness of places, which gives the demons power against us. And the providence of God sometimes allows this to happen so that we may learn from it.

The servant of the Lord will be afraid only of his Master, while the man who does not yet fear Him is often scared by his own shadow. The body is terrified by the presence of an invisible spirit. Yet when an angel stands nearby, the soul of the humble is exultant. So if we detect an angel by the effect he is producing, let us hasten to pray since our heavenly guardian has come to join us.⁸⁰

79. HTM adds: "But actual freedom from cowardice comes when we eagerly accept all unexpected events with a contrite heart."

80. HTM adds: "He who has conquered cowardice has clearly dedicated his life and soul to God."

Step 22

ON VAINGLORY

Some would hold that vainglory is to be distinguished from pride, and so they give it a special place and chapter. Hence their claim that there are eight deadly sins. But against this is the view of Gregory the Theologian⁸¹ and other teachers that in fact the number is seven. I also hold this view. After all, what pride remains in a man who has conquered vainglory? The difference is between a child and a man, between wheat and bread, for the first is a beginning and the second an end. Therefore, as the occasion demands, let us talk about the unholy vice of self-esteem, the beginning and completion of the passions; and let us talk briefly, for to undertake an exhaustive discussion would be to act like someone who inquires into the weight of the winds.

From the point of view of form, vainglory is a change of nature, a perversion of character, a taking note of criticism.^{81a} As for its quality, it is a waste of work and sweat, a betrayal of treasure, an offspring

81. In fact Gregory the Great. The eight principal temptations of Evagrius were gluttony, lust, avarice, dejection, anger, despondency ("accidie"), vainglory and pride. Cassian introduced this list to the West. Pope Gregory the Great reduced the number to seven by amalgamating vainglory with pride and dejection with despondency and by introducing envy. Cf. the Preface, p. 63.

81a. The sense is not clear. One would expect the opposite to *paratirisis*, viz. "a refusal to take note of criticism," as in the Latin translation (PG 88, 950A).

of unbelief, a harbinger of pride, shipwreck in port, the ant on the threshing floor, small and yet with designs on all the fruit of one's labor. The ant waits until the wheat is in, vainglory until the riches of excellence are gathered; the one a thief, the other a wastrel.

The spirit of despair exults at the sight of mounting vice, the spirit of vainglory at the sight of the growing treasures of virtue. The door for the one is a mass of wounds, while the gateway for the other is the wealth of hard work done.

Watch vainglory. Notice how, until the very day of the burial it rejoices in clothes, oils, servants, perfumes, and such like.

Like the sun which shines on all alike, vainglory beams on every occupation. What I mean is this. I fast, and turn vainglorious. I stop fasting so that I will draw no attention to myself, and I become vainglorious over my prudence. I dress well or badly, and am vainglorious in either case. I talk or I hold my peace, and each time I am defeated. No matter how I shed this prickly thing, a spike remains to stand up against me.

A vainglorious man is a believer—and an idolator. Apparently honoring God, he actually is out to please not God but men. To be a showoff is to be vainglorious, and the fast of such a man is unrewarded and his prayer futile, since he is practicing both to win praise. A vainglorious ascetic doubly cheats himself, wearying his body and getting no reward. Who would not laugh at this vainglorious worker, standing for the psalms and moved by vainglory sometimes to laughter and sometimes to tears for all to see?

The Lord frequently hides from us even the perfections we have obtained. But the man who praises us, or, rather, who misleads us, opens our eyes with his words and once our eyes are opened our treasures vanish.

The flatterer is a servant of the devils, a teacher of pride, the destroyer of contrition, a vandal of excellence, a perverse guide. The prophet says this: "Those who honor you deceive you" (Isa. 3:12).

Men of high spirit endure offense nobly and willingly. But only the holy and the saintly can pass unscathed through praise. And I have seen men in mourning who, on being praised, reared up in anger, one passion giving way to another as at some public meeting.

"No one knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit within him" (1 Cor. 2:11). Hence those who want to praise us to our face should be ashamed and silent.

When you hear that your neighbor or your friend has denounced

you behind your back or indeed in your presence, show him love and try to compliment him.

It is a great achievement to shrug the praise of men off one's soul. Greater still is to reject the praise of demons.

It is not the self-critical who reveals his humility (for does not everyone have somehow to put up with himself?). Rather it is the man who continues to love the person who has criticized him.

I have seen the demon of vainglory suggesting thoughts to one brother, revealing them to another, and getting the second man to tell the first what he is thinking and then praising him for his ability to read minds. And that dreadful demon has even lighted on parts of the body, shaking and stirring them.

Ignore him when he tells you to accept the office of bishop or abbot or teacher. It is hard to drive a dog from a butcher's counter.

When he notices that someone has achieved a measure of interior calm, he immediately suggests to him the need to return from the desert to the world, in order to save those who are perishing.

Ethiopians have one kind of appearance, statues another. So too is it the case that the vainglory of those living in community is different from that which obtains in the desert.

Vainglory anticipates the arrival of guests from the outside world. It prompts the more frivolous monk to rush out to meet them, to fall at their feet, to give the appearance of humility, when in fact he is full of pride. It makes him look and sound modest and directs his eye to the visitors' hands in the hope of getting something from them. It induces him to address them as "lords and patrons, graced with godly life." At table it makes him urge abstinence on someone else and fiercely criticize subordinates. It enables those who are standing in a slovenly manner during the singing of psalms to make an effort, those who have no voice to sing well, and those who are sleepy to wake up. It flatters the precentor, seeks the first place in the choir, and addresses him as father and master while the visitors are still there.

Vainglory induces pride in the favored and resentment in those who are slighted. Often it causes dishonor instead of honor, because it brings great shame to its angry disciples. It makes the quick-tempered look mild before men. It thrives amid talent and frequently brings catastrophe on those enslaved to it.

I have seen a demon harm and chase away his own brother. Visitors from the outside world came just at a moment when a brother

got angry and the wretched man gave himself over to vainglory. He was unable to serve two passions at the one time.

The servant of vainglory leads a double life. To outward appearance, he lives with monks; but in his heart of hearts he is in the world.

If we really long for heavenly things, we will surely taste the glory above. And whoever has tasted that will think nothing of earthly glory. For it would surprise me if someone could hold the latter in contempt unless he had tasted the former.

It often happens that having been left naked by vainglory, we turn around and strip it ourselves more cleverly. For I have encountered some who embarked on the spiritual life out of vainglory, making therefore a bad start, and yet they finished up in a most admirable way because they changed their intentions.

A man who takes pride in natural abilities—I mean cleverness, the ability to learn, skill in reading, good diction, quick grasp, and all such skills as we possess without having to work for them—this man, I say, will never receive the blessings of heaven, since the man who is unfaithful in little is unfaithful and vainglorious in much. And there are men who wear out their bodies to no purpose in the pursuit of total dispassion, heavenly treasures, miracle working, and prophetic ability, and the poor fools do not realize that humility, not hard work, is the mother of such things. The man who seeks a *quid pro quo* from God builds on uncertainty, whereas the man who considers himself a debtor will receive sudden and unexpected riches.

When the winnower⁸² tells you to show off your virtues for the benefit of an audience, do not yield to him. "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and destroy himself?" (Matt. 16:26).

Our neighbor is moved by nothing so much as by a sincere and humble way of talking and of behaving. It is an example and a spur to others never to turn proud. And there is nothing to equal the benefit of this.

A man of insight told me this: "I was once sitting at an assembly," he said. "The demon of vainglory and the demon of pride came to sit on either side of me. One poked me with the finger of vainglory and encouraged me to talk publicly about some vision or labor of mine in the desert. I shook him off with the words: 'Let those who wish me harm be driven back and let them blush' (Ps. 39:15). Then the demon on my left at once said in my ear: 'Well done! Well done!

You have become great by conquering my shameless mother.' Turning to him I answered appropriately, making use of the rest of the verse: 'Defeat and shame on all who say, "Well done! Well done!"' " And how is it, I asked him, that vainglory is the mother of pride. His answer was this: "Praise exalts and puffs me up, and when the soul is exalted, pride lifts it up as high as heaven—and then throws it down into the abyss."

But there is a glory that comes from the Lord. "I will glorify those who glorify Me," He says (1 Kings [1 Sam.] 2:30). And there is a glory that follows it which is contrived by the demons, for it is said, "Woe to you when all men shall speak well of you" (Luke 6:26). You can recognize the first kind of glory when you look on it as dangerous and run from it in every possible way, hiding your life-style wherever you are. And you may be certain of the other sort when you find yourself doing something, however small, with the hope that men may notice you.

Dread vainglory urges us to pretend that we have some virtue which does not belong to us. It encourages us with the text: "Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good deeds" (Matt. 5:16).

The Lord often humbles the vainglorious by causing some dishonor to befall them. And indeed the first step in overcoming vainglory is to remain silent and to accept dishonor gladly. The middle stage is to check every act of vainglory while it is still in thought. The end—insofar as one may talk of an end to an abyss—is to be able to accept humiliation before others without actually feeling it.

Do not conceal your sin because of the idea that you must not scandalize your neighbor. Of course this injunction must not be adhered to blindly. It will depend on the nature of one's sinfulness.

If ever we seek glory, if it comes our way uninvited, or if we plan some course of action because of our vainglory, we should think of our mourning and of the blessed fear on us as we stood alone in prayer before God. If we do this we will assuredly outflank shameless vainglory, that is if our wish for true prayer is genuine. This may be insufficient. In which case let us briefly remember that we must die. Should this also prove ineffective, let us at least go in fear of the shame that always comes after honor, for assuredly he who exalts himself will be humbled not only there but here also.

When those who praise us, or, rather, those who lead us astray, begin to exalt us, we should briefly remember the multitude of our

82. I.e., the devil.

sins and in this way we will discover that we do not deserve whatever is said or done in our honor.

Some of the prayers of the vainglorious no doubt deserve to win the attention of God, but He regularly anticipates their wishes and petitions so that their pride may not be increased by the success of their prayers.

Simpler people do not usually succumb to the poison of vainglory, which is, after all, a loss of simplicity and a hypocritical mode of behavior.

A worm, fully grown, often sprouts wings and can fly up high. Vainglory, fully grown, can give birth to pride, which is the beginning and the end of all evil.

Anyone free of this sickness is close to salvation. Anyone affected by it is far removed from the glory of the saints.

Such, then, is the twenty-second step. The man untouched by vainglory will not tumble into that senseless pride which is so detestable to God.

Step 23

ON PRIDE

Pride is a denial of God, an invention of the devil, contempt for men. It is the mother of condemnation, the offspring of praise, a sign of barrenness. It is a flight from God's help, the harbinger of madness, the author of downfall. It is the cause of diabolical possession, the source of anger, the gateway of hypocrisy. It is the fortress of demons, the custodian of sins, the source of hardheartedness. It is the denial of compassion, a bitter pharisee, a cruel judge. It is the foe of God. It is the root of blasphemy.

Pride begins where vainglory leaves off. Its midpoint comes with the humiliation of our neighbor, the shameless parading of our achievements, complacency, and unwillingness to be found out. It ends with the spurning of God's help, the exalting of one's own efforts and a devilish disposition.

Listen, therefore, all who wish to avoid this pit. This passion often draws strength initially from the giving of thanks, and at first it does not shamelessly urge us to renounce God. I have seen people who speak aloud their thanks to God but who in their hearts are glorifying themselves, something demonstrated by that Pharisee with his "O God, I thank You" (Luke 18:11).

Pride takes up residence wherever we have lapsed, for a lapse is in fact an indication of pride. And an admirable man said once to me:

"Think of a dozen shameful passions. Love one of them, I mean pride, and it will take up the space of all the other eleven."^{82a}

A proud monk argues bitterly with others. The humble monk is loath to contradict them.

The cypress tree does not bend to the ground in order to walk, nor does the haughty monk in order to gain obedience.

The proud man wants to be in charge of things. He would feel lost otherwise.

"God resists the proud" (James 4:6). Who then could have mercy on them? Before God every proud man is unclean and who then could purify such a person?

For the proud correction is a fall, a thorn (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7) is a devil, and abandonment by God is madness. Whereas in the first two instances there are human cures available, this last cannot be healed by man.

To reject criticism is to show pride, while to accept it is to show oneself free of this fetter.

Pride and nothing else caused an angel to fall from heaven. And so one may reasonably ask whether one may reach heaven by humility alone without the help of any other virtue.

Pride loses the profits of all hard work and sweat. They clamored, but there was none to save them, because they clamored with pride. They clamored to God and He paid no heed since they were not really trying to root out the faults against which they were praying.

An old man, very experienced in these matters, once spiritually admonished a proud brother who said in his blindness: "Forgive me, father, but I am not proud." "My son," said the wise old man, "what better proof of your pride could you have given than to claim that you were not proud?"

A help to the proud is submissiveness, a tougher and humbler mode of life, and the reading of the supernatural feats of the Fathers. Even then there will perhaps be little hope of salvation for those who suffer from this disease.

While it is disgraceful to be puffed up over the adornments of others, it is sheer lunacy to imagine that one has deserved the gifts of

God. You may be proud only of the achievements you had before the time of your birth. But anything after that, indeed the birth itself, is a gift from God. You may claim only those virtues in you that are there independently of your mind, for your mind was bestowed on you by God. And you may claim only those victories you achieved independently of the body, for the body too is not yours but a work of God.

Do not be self-confident before judgment has been passed on you. Remember the guest at the marriage feast. He got there, and then, tied hand and foot, he was thrown into the dark outside (cf. Matt. 22:13). So do not be stiff-necked, since you are a material being. Many although holy and unencumbered by a body were thrown out even from heaven.

When the demon of pride finds a place for himself among his own, he appears to them, in sleep or awake, and he looks like a holy angel or martyr and he hints at mysteries to be revealed or spiritual gifts to be granted, that the wretches may be deceived and driven utterly out of their minds.

If we were to die ten thousand times for Christ, we would still not have repaid what we owe, for in value rather than physical substance there is no comparison between the blood of God and that of His servants.

We should always be on the lookout to compare ourselves with the Fathers and the lights who have gone before us. If we do, we will discover that we have scarcely begun the ascetic life, that we have hardly kept our vow in a holy manner, and that our thinking is still rooted in the world.

A real monk is one whose soul's eye is not haughty and whose bodily senses are unmoved.

A monk is one who fights his enemies, like the wild beasts that they are, and harries them as he makes his escape from them.

To be a monk is to know ecstasy without end and to grieve for life.

A monk is shaped by virtues in the way that others are shaped by pleasures.

A monk has an unfailing light in the eye of the heart.

A monk is an abyss of humility in which every evil spirit has been plunged and smothered.

Pride makes us forget our sins, for the remembrance of them leads to humility.

Pride is utter poverty of soul disguised as riches, imaginary light

^{82a} St. Mark the Ascetic, *On the Spiritual Law*, § 136 (PG 65, 921C) (reading *dodeka*): ET *Phil.*, § 135, p. 119.

where in fact there is darkness. This abominable vice not only stops our progress but even tosses us down from the heights we have reached.

The proud man is a pomegranate, gone bad within, radiant outside.

A proud monk needs no demon. He has turned into one, an enemy to himself.

Darkness is alien to light. Pride is alien to every virtue.

Blaspheming words rise up in the hearts of the proud, heavenly visions in the hearts of the humble.

A thief hates the sun. A proud man despises the meek.

It happens, I do not know how, that most of the proud never really discover their true selves. They think they have conquered their passions and they find out how poor they really are only after they die.

The man ensnared by pride will need God's help, since man is of no use to him.

I captured this senseless deceiver once. It was rising up in my heart and on its shoulders was vainglory, its mother. I roped them with the noose of obedience and flailed them with the whip of humility. Then I lashed them and asked how they had managed to gain access to me. "We have no beginning and no birth," they said, "for we are the source and the begetters of all the passions. The strongest opposition to us comes from the contrition of heart that grows out of obedience. We can endure no authority over us, which is why we fell from heaven where we surely had authority. In short, we are the authors and the progenitors of everything opposed to humility, for everything that favors humility brings us low. We prevail everywhere except in heaven. So, then, where will you run to escape us? You will find us often where there is patient endurance of dishonor, where there is obedience and freedom from anger, where there is willingness to bear no grudge, where one's neighbor is served. And our children are the falls of those who lead the life of the spirit. Their names: Anger, Calumny, Spite, Irascibility, Yelling, Blasphemy, Hypocrisy, Hatred, Envy, Argumentativeness, Self-will, Disobedience.

"There is only one thing with which we cannot interfere, and the violence you do us will make us admit what this is. If you can honestly condemn yourself before the Lord, then indeed you will find us as flimsy as a cobweb. For, you see, Vainglory is pride's saddle-horse on which I am mounted. But holy Humility and Self-depre-

cation will laugh at the horse and its rider and will joyfully sing the song of triumph: 'Let us sing to the Lord, for He has been truly glorified. Horse and rider He has thrown into the sea' (Exod. 15:1), into the depths of humility."

Such is the twenty-third step. Whoever climbs it, if indeed anyone can, will certainly be strong.

Concerning unspeakably blasphemous Thoughts

As we have already heard, from a troublesome root and mother comes a most troublesome offspring. What I mean is that unspeakable blasphemy is the child of dreadful pride. Hence the need to talk about it, since it is no ordinary foe but is far and away the deadliest enemy of all. Worse still, it is extremely hard to articulate and to confess it and therefore to discuss it with a spiritual healer, and the result has been to cause frustration and despair in many people, for like a worm in a tree this unholy enemy gnaws away all hope.

This atrocious foe has the habit of appearing during the holy services and even at the awesome hour of the Mysteries, and blaspheming the Lord and the consecrated elements, thereby showing that these unspeakable, unacceptable, and unthinkable words are not ours but rather those of the God-hating demon who fled from heaven because, it seems, of the blasphemies he uttered there too against the Lord. It must be so, for if these dreadful and unholy words are my own, how could I offer humble worship after having partaken of the sacred gift? How could I revile and praise at the same time?

This deceiver, this destroyer of souls, has often caused men to go mad. And no other thought is as difficult to admit in confession, which is why so many are dogged by it all their days. In fact nothing gives demons and evil thoughts such power over us as to nourish them and hide them in our hearts unconfessed.

If you have blasphemous thoughts, do not think that you are to blame. God knows what is in our hearts and He knows that ideas of this kind come not from us but from our enemies.

Drunkenness leads to stumbling. Pride leads to unholy thoughts. The drunkard will be punished not for his stumbling but for his drunkenness.

Those unclean and unspeakable thoughts come at us when we are praying, but, if we continue to pray to the end, they will retreat, for they do not struggle against those who resist them.

This unholy demon not only blasphemes God and everything

that is divine. It stirs up the dirtiest and most obscene thoughts within us, thereby trying to force us to give up praying or to fall into despair. It stops the prayer of many and turns many away from the holy Mysteries. It has evilly and tyrannously caused the bodies of some to be worn away with grief. It has exhausted others with fasting and has given them no rest. It has struck at people living in the world, and also at those leading the monastic life, whispering that there is no salvation in store for them, murmuring that they are more to be pitied than any unbeliever or pagan.

Anyone disturbed by the spirit of blasphemy and wishing to be rid of it should bear in mind that thoughts of this type do not originate in his own soul but are caused by that unclean devil who once said to the Lord: "I will give you all this if only You fall down and adore me" (Matt. 4:9). So let us make light of him and pay no regard whatever to his promptings. Let us say: "'Get behind me, Satan! I will worship the Lord my God and I will serve only Him' (Matt. 4:10). May your word and your effort rebound on you, and your blasphemies come down on your own head now and in the world to come." To tackle the demon of blasphemy in any way other than this is to be like a man trying to hold lightning in his hands. For how can you take a grip on, seize, or grapple with someone who flits into the heart quicker than the wind, talks more rapidly than a flash, and then immediately vanishes? Every other kind of foe stops, struggles a while, lingers and gives one time to grapple with him. But not this one. He hardly appears and is gone again immediately. He barely speaks and then vanishes.

This particular demon likes to take up residence in the minds of simpler and more innocent souls, and these are more upset and disturbed by it than others. To such people we could quite rightly say that what is happening to them is due not to their own undue self-esteem but to the jealousy of the demons.

Let us refrain from passing judgment or condemnation on our neighbor. If we do, then we will not be terrorized by blasphemous thoughts, since the one produces the other.

The situation here is like that of someone shut up in his own house who overhears but does not join in the conversation of passers-by. The soul that keeps to itself overhears and is disturbed by the blasphemies of devils who are merely transients.

Hold this foe in contempt and you will be liberated from its torments. Try cleverly to fight it and you will end up by surrendering,

for the man who tries to conquer spirits by talk is like someone hoping to lock up the winds.

There was once a zealous monk who was badly troubled by this demon. For twenty years he wore himself out with fasting and vigils, but to no avail, as he realized. So he wrote the temptation on a sheet of paper, went to a certain holy man, handed him the paper, bowed his face to the ground and dared not to look up. The old man read it, smiled, lifted the brother and said to him: "My son, put your hand on my neck." The brother did so. Then the great man said: "Very well, brother. Now let this sin be on my neck for as many years as it has been or will be active within you. But from now on, ignore it." And the monk who had been tempted in this fashion assured me that even before he had left the cell of this old man, his infirmity was gone. The man who had actually experienced this told me about it, giving thanks to Christ.

He who has defeated this vice has banished pride.

Step 25

ON HUMILITY

Do you imagine that plain words can precisely or truly or appropriately or clearly or sincerely describe the love of the Lord, humility, blessed purity, divine enlightenment, fear of God, and assurance of the heart? Do you imagine that talk of such matters will mean anything to someone who has never experienced them? If you think so, then you will be like a man who with words and examples tries to convey the sweetness of honey to people who have never tasted it. He talks uselessly. Indeed I would say he is simply prattling. The same applies in the first instance. A man stands revealed as either having had no experience of what he is talking about or as having fallen into the grip of vainglory.

Our theme sets before us as a touchstone a treasure stored safely in earthen vessels, that is, in our bodies. This treasure is of a quality that eludes adequate description. It carries an inscription of heavenly origin which is therefore incomprehensible so that anyone seeking words for it is faced with a great and endless task. The inscription reads as follows: "Holy Humility."

Let all who are led by the Spirit of God come with us into this spiritual and wise assembly. Let them hold in their spiritual hands the tablets of knowledge inscribed by God Himself. We have come together. We have put our questions. We have searched for the meaning of this precious inscription.

THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT

"Humility is constant forgetfulness of one's achievements," someone says.

"It is the admission that in all the world one is the least important and is also the greatest sinner," another says.

"It is the mind's awareness that one is weak and helpless," a third says.

"It is to forestall one's neighbor at a contentious moment and to be the first to end a quarrel."

"It is the acknowledgement of divine grace and divine mercy."

"It is the disposition of a contrite soul and the abdication of one's own will."

I listened to all this and thought it over carefully and soberly, and was not able to grasp the sense of that blessed virtue from what I had heard. I was the last to speak; and, like a dog gathering crumbs from a table, I collected what those learned and blessed fathers had said and went on from there to propose my own definition: "Humility is a grace in the soul and with a name known only to those who have had experience of it. It is indescribable wealth, a name and a gift from God. 'Learn from Me,' He said; that is, not from an angel, not from a man, not from a book, but 'from Me,' that is, from My dwelling within you, from My illumination and action within you, for 'I am gentle and meek of heart' (Matt. 11:29) in thought and in spirit, and your souls will find rest from conflicts and relief from evil thoughts."

The appearance of this sacred vine is one thing during the winter of passions, another in the springtime of flowering, and still another in the harvesttime of all the virtues. Yet all these appearances have one thing in common, namely, joy and the bearing of fruit, and they all give sure signs and evidence of the harvest to come. As soon as the cluster of holy humility begins to flower within us, we come, after hard work, to hate all earthly praise and glory. We rid ourselves of rage and fury; and the more this queen of virtues spreads within our souls through spiritual growth, the more we begin to regard all our good deeds as of no consequence, in fact as loathsome. For every day we somehow imagine that we are adding to our burden by an ignorant scattering, that the very abundance of God's gifts to us is so much in excess of what we deserve that the punishment due to us becomes thereby all the greater. Hence our minds remain secure, locked up in the purse of modesty, aware of the knocks and the jeers of

thieves and yet untroubled by them, because modesty is an unassailable strongroom.

We have so far risked a few words of a philosophical kind regarding the blossoming and the growth of this everblooming fruit. But those of you who are close to the Lord Himself must find out from Him what the perfect reward is of this holy virtue, since there is no way of measuring the sheer abundance of such blessed wealth, nor could words convey its quality. Nevertheless, we must try to express the thoughts that occur to us about its distinguishing characteristics.

Real repentance, mourning scrubbed of all impurity, and holy humility among beginners are as different and distinct from one another as yeast and flour from bread. The soul is ground and refined by visible repentance. The waters of true mourning bring it to a certain unity. I would even go so far as to speak of a mingling with God. Then, kindled by the fire of the Lord, blessed humility is made into bread and made firm without the leaven of pride. The outcome of all this is a three-stranded cord (cf. Eccles. 4:12), a heavenly rainbow coming together as a single power and energy, with its own effects and characteristics. Speak of one and we imply the other two. And I will now briefly try to prove the truth of what I am saying.

The first and principal token of this excellent and admirable triad is the delighted readiness of the soul to accept indignity, to receive it with open arms, to welcome it as something that relieves and cauterizes diseases of the soul and grievous sins. The second token is the wiping out of anger—and modesty over the fact that it has subsided. Third and preeminent is the honest distrust of one's own virtues, together with an unending desire to learn more.

"The end of the law and the prophets is Christ, for the justification of every believer" (Rom. 10:4). And the end of impure passions is vainglory and pride for every man who fails to deal with the problem. But their destroyer is a spiritual stag⁸⁶ which keeps the man who lives with it safe from every poison. The deadly bane of hypocrisy and of calumny can surely never appear where there is humility. Where will this snake nestle and hide? Will it not be pulled out from the heart's earth to be killed and done away with? Where there is hu-

mility there will be no sign of hatred, no species of quarrelsomeness, no whiff of disobedience—unless of course some question of faith arises. The man with humility for his bride will be gentle, kind, inclined to compunction, sympathetic, calm in every situation, radiant, easy to get along with, inoffensive, alert and active. In a word, free from passion. "The Lord remembered us in our humility and delivered us from our enemies" (Ps. 135:23–24), that is, from our passions and from our impurities.

A humble monk will not preoccupy himself with mysteries. A proud monk busies himself with the hidden judgments of God.

Demons once heaped praise on one of the most discerning of the brothers. They even appeared to him in visible form. But this very wise man spoke to them as follows: "If you cease to praise me by way of the thoughts of my heart, I shall consider myself to be great and outstanding because of the fact that you have left me. But if you continue to praise me, I must deduce from such praise that I am very impure indeed, since every proudhearted man is unclean before the Lord (cf. Prov. 16:5). So leave me, and I shall become great, or else praise me, and with your help I shall earn more humility." Struck by this dilemma, they vanished.

Let not your soul be a hollow in the stream of life, a hollow sometimes full and sometimes dried up by the heat of vainglory and pride. Instead, may your soul be a spring-head of dispassion that wells up into a river of poverty. Friend, remember that corn and the fruit of the spirit will stand high in the valleys (cf. Ps. 64:14). The valley is a soul made humble among the mountains of labors and virtues. It always remains unproud and steadfast. In Scripture are the words, "I humbled myself, and the Lord hastened to rescue me" (Ps. 114:6); and these words are there instead of "I have fasted," "I have kept vigil," "I lay down on the bare earth."

Repentance lifts a man up. Mourning knocks at heaven's gate. Holy humility opens it. This I say, and I worship a Trinity in Unity and a Unity in Trinity.

The sun lights up everything visible. Humility reaches across everything done according to reason. Where there is no light, all is in darkness. Where there is no humility, all is rotten.

In the entire universe there is a unique place that saw the sun just once. And there is a unique thought that has given rise to humil-

86. The stag was thought to be able to kill snakes after first drawing them out of their holes with the breath of its nostrils (cf. Origen, *Hom. 2, 11 in Cant.* : PG 13, 56C).

ity. There was a unique day on which the whole world rejoiced. And there is a unique virtue the demons cannot imitate.⁸⁷

To exalt oneself is one thing, not to do so another, and to humble oneself is something else entirely. A man may always be passing judgment on others, while another man passes judgment neither on others nor on himself. A third, however, though actually guiltless, may always be passing judgment on himself.

There is a difference between being humble, striving for humility, and praising the humble. The first is a mark of the perfect, the second of the obedient, and the third of all the faithful.

A man truly humble within himself will never find his tongue betraying him. What is not in the treasury cannot be brought out through the door.

A solitary horse can often imagine itself to be at full gallop, but when it finds itself in a herd it then discovers how slow it actually is.

A first sign of emerging health is when our thoughts are no longer filled with a proud sense of our aptitudes. As long as the stench of pride lingers in the nose, the fragrance of myrrh will go unnoticed.

Holy humility had this to say: "The one who loves me will not condemn someone, or pass judgment on anyone, or lord it over someone else, or show off his wisdom until he has been united with me. A man truly joined to me is no longer in bondage to the Law."

The unholy demons once began to murmur praise in the heart of an ascetic who was struggling to achieve blessed humility. However, God inspired him to use a holy trick to defeat the cleverness of these spirits. The monk got up and on the wall of his cell he wrote in sequence the names of the major virtues: perfect love, angelic humility, pure prayer, unassailable chastity, and others of a similar kind. The result was that whenever vainglorious thoughts began to puff him up, he would say: "Come! Let us go to be judged." Going to the wall he would read the names there and would cry out to himself: "When you

87. The scholiast explains two of these allusions as follows: "The unique place is the floor of the Red Sea during the crossing of Israel. The day of universal joy is none other than the day of the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, on which our race was freed from the eternal bonds of Hades. Others say that it is the day of the nativity, on which the glory to God in the highest of the angels was heard. Others say that it is the day on which Noah and his companions came out of the ark" (scholion 10 [1005B]). According to another scholion, attributed to John of Raithu, the unique thought is "the constant thought of death, and meditation on eternal judgment and on the Cross and death of Christ" (PG 88, 1236C). The unique virtue is humility.

have every one of these virtues within you, then you will have an accurate sense of how far from God you still are."

No one of us can describe the power and nature of the sun. We can merely deduce its intrinsic nature from its characteristics and effects. So too with humility, which is a God-given protection against seeing our own achievements. It is an abyss of self-abasement to which no thief can gain entry. It is a tower of strength against the enemy. "Against him the enemy will not prevail and the son (or, rather, the thought) of iniquity will do him no harm and he will cut off his enemies before him" (Ps. 88:23-24) and will put to flight those who hate him.

The great possessor of this treasure has other properties in his soul besides those referred to above. These properties, with one exception, are manifest tokens of this wealth. You will know that you have this holy gift within you and not be led astray when you experience an abundance of unspeakable light together with an indescribable love of prayer. Even before reaching this stage, you may have it, if in your heart you pass no judgment on the faults of others. And a precursor of what we have described is hatred of all vainglory.

The man who has come to know himself with the full awareness of his soul has sown in good ground. However, anyone who has not sown in this way cannot expect humility to flower within him. And anyone who has acquired knowledge of self has come to understand the fear of the Lord, and walking with the help of this fear, he has arrived at the doorway of love. For humility is the door to the kingdom, opening up to those who come near. It was of that door, I believe, that the Lord spoke when He said: "He shall go in and come out of life" and not be afraid "and he shall find pasture" (John 10:8-9) and the green grass of Paradise. And whoever has entered monastic life by some other door is a thief and a robber of his own life.

Those of us who wish to gain understanding must never stop examining ourselves and if in the perception of your soul you realize that your neighbor is superior to you in all respects, then the mercy of God is surely near at hand.

Snow cannot burst into flames. It is even less possible for humility to abide in a heretic. This achievement belongs only to the pious and the faithful, and then only when they have been purified.

Most of us would describe ourselves as sinners. And perhaps we really think so. But it is indignity that shows up the true state of the heart.

Whoever is eager for the peaceful haven of humility will never cease to do all he possibly can to get there, and with words and thoughts, with considerations and explanations, with questionings and probings, with every device, with prayer and supplication, with meditation and reflection, he will push onward, helped by God, humiliated and despised and toiling mightily, and he will sail the ship of his soul out from the ever-stormy ocean of vainglory. For the man delivered from this sin wins ready pardon for all his other sins, like the publican in Scripture.

Some drive out empty pride by thinking to the end of their lives of their past misdeeds, for which they were forgiven and which now serve as a spur to humility. Others, remembering the passion of Christ, think of themselves as eternally in debt. Others hold themselves in contempt when they think of their daily lapses. Others come to possess this mother of graces by way of their continuous temptations, weaknesses, and sins.⁸⁸ There are some—and I cannot say if they are to be found nowadays—who humble themselves in proportion to the gifts they receive from God and live with a sense of their unworthiness to have such wealth bestowed on them, so that each day they think of themselves as sinking further into debt. That is real humility, real beatitude, a real reward! And you may be sure that it is by this particularly blessed route that anyone has traveled who in a few short years has arrived at the summit of dispassion.

Love and humility make a holy team. The one exalts. The other supports those who have been exalted and never falls.

There is a difference between contrition, self-knowledge, and humility.

Contrition is the outcome of a lapse. A man who has lapsed breaks down and prays without arrogance, though with laudable persistence, disarrayed and yet clinging to the staff of hope, indeed using it to drive off the dog of despair.

Self-knowledge is a clear-eyed notion of one's own spiritual advance. It is also an unwavering remembrance of one's lightest sins.

Humility is a spiritual teaching of Christ led spiritually like a bride into the inner chamber of the soul of those deemed worthy of it, and it somehow eludes all description.

88. HTM has a fuller version of this sentence: "Others, as a result of their besetting temptations, infirmities and sins, have mortified their pride. Others for want of graces have appropriated the mother of graces (i.e. humility)."

A man says that he is experiencing the full fragrance of this myrrh within him. Someone happens to praise him, and if he feels the slightest stir of the heart or if he grasps the full import of what is being said, then he is certainly mistaken, and let him have no illusion about that fact.

"Not to us, not to us, but to Your name, O Lord, give glory" (Ps. 113:9). I once heard a man say this with total sincerity. He was a man who well understood that human nature is such that it cannot remain unharmed by praise. "My praise shall be from You in the great assembly, Lord" (Ps. 21:26), that is, in the life to come, and I cannot accept it before that without risk to myself.

If the outer limit, the rule, and the characteristic of extreme pride is for a man to make a show of having virtues he does not actually possess for the sake of glory, then surely the token of extreme humility will be to lower ourselves by claiming weaknesses we do not really have. This was what one man did when he took the bread and cheese in his hands.⁸⁹ This too was the way of the man who was free of all fleshly lust but who used to take his clothes off and parade naked through the whole city.⁹⁰ Men like these do not worry about giving scandal, for through prayer they have received the power to reassure all men invisibly. Indeed, to be afraid of censure is to show lack of ability in prayer. And when God is ready to hear our prayers we can achieve anything.

Better to offend man than God. For God is delighted when He sees us courting dishonor for the purpose of crushing, striking, and destroying our empty self-esteem. And virtue of this sort comes only from a complete abandonment of the world and only the really great can endure the derision of their own folk. This should not surprise you. The fact is that no one can climb a ladder in a single stride. And in this matter it is not on account of the devils subjected to us that men will recognize us as disciples of God, but because our names are written in the heaven of humility (cf. Luke 10:20).

A lemon tree naturally lifts its branches upwards when it has no fruit. The more its branches bend, the more fruit you will find there. The meaning of this will be clear to the man disposed to understand it.

Holy humility receives from God the power to yield fruit thirty-

89. Abba Simon: *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Simon.

90. Sarapion the Sindonite: Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, ch. 37.

fold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold. The dispassionate attain that last degree, the courageous the middle, and everyone can rise to the first.

The man who has come to know himself is never fooled into reaching for what is beyond him. He keeps his feet henceforth on the blessed path of humility.

Just as birds fear the sight of a hawk, those who practice humility fear the sound of an argument.

Many have attained salvation without the aid of prophecies, illumination, signs and wonders. But without humility no one will enter the marriage chamber, for humility is the guardian of such gifts. Without it, they will bring disaster on the frivolous.

Because of our unwillingness to humble ourselves, God has arranged that no one can see his own faults as clearly as his neighbor does. Hence our obligation to be grateful not to ourselves but to our neighbor and to God for our healing.

A humble man will always hate his own will as a cause of error. In his petitions to the Lord which he makes with unwavering faith he learns what he should do and obeys. He does not spend his time scrutinizing the lifestyle of his superiors. He lays all his burden on the God Who used an ass to teach Balaam what had to be done. All the acts, thoughts, and words of such a man are directed to the will of God and he never trusts himself. Indeed, to a humble man, self-confidence is as much a thorn and a burden as the orders of someone else are to a proud man.

In my opinion, an angel is characterized by the fact that he is not tricked into sinning. And I hear those words of an earthly angel:⁹¹ "I am aware of nothing against myself and yet I am not thereby justified. It is the Lord Who is my Judge" (1 Cor. 4:4). So we must always condemn and criticize ourselves in order that by means of deliberately chosen humiliations we may protect ourselves from unwitting sin. And if we do not do this, our punishment at death will be heavy indeed.

The man who asks God for less than he deserves will certainly receive more, as is shown by the publican who begged forgiveness but obtained salvation (cf. Luke 18:10-14). And the robber asked only to be remembered in the kingdom, yet he inherited all of Paradise (cf. Luke 23:43).

In the created world fire cannot naturally be both small and

91. In Greek "angel" means "messenger."

great at one and the same time. Humility cannot be genuine and at one and the same time have a worldly strain.⁹² Genuine humility is not in us if we fall into voluntary sin, and this is the sign that there is something material still within us.

The Lord understood that the virtue of the soul is shaped by our outward behavior. He therefore took a towel and showed us how to walk the road of humility (cf. John 13:4). The soul indeed is molded by the doings of the body, conforming to and taking shape from what it does. To one of the angels it was the fact of being a ruler that led to pride, though it was not for this reason that the prerogative was originally granted to him.

A man who sits on a throne acts in one way, and the man who sits on a dunghill acts in another. That, perhaps, is the reason why that great and just man⁹³ sat on the dunghill outside the city. Totally humbled, he said in all sincerity, "I despise myself, waste away" (Job 42:6), and have regarded myself as dust and ashes.

I note that Manasseh sinned like no other man. He defiled the temple of God with idols and he contaminated the sacred Liturgy (cf. 4 [2] Kings 21:4). A fast by all the world could not have made reparation for his sin, and yet humility could heal his incurable wound. "If You wanted sacrifice I would have given it," David says to God, "but You will not be satisfied with holocausts," that is, with bodies worn out by fasting. "The sacrifice for God is a contrite spirit. God will not despise a humble and contrite heart" (Ps. 50:17). Following on adultery and murder, blessed humility once cried out to God, "I have sinned against the Lord," and the reply was heard: "The Lord has put away your sin" (2 Kings [2 Sam.] 12:13).

The wonderful Fathers proclaimed physical labor to be the way to and the foundation of humility. To this I would add obedience and honesty of heart, since these are by nature opposed to self-aggrandizement.

If pride turned some of the angels into demons, then humility can doubtless make angels out of demons. So take heart, all you sinners.

92. This passage is obscure. It may be translated alternatively: "It is impossible to see a fire, whether small or great, existing by nature in any creature. Similarly, it is impossible to see any trace of the form of matter (i.e., sin) existing in genuine humility."

93. I.e., Job.

Let us strive with all our might to reach that summit of humility, or let us at least climb onto her shoulders. And if this is too much for us, let us at least not tumble out of her arms, since after such a tumble a man will scarcely receive any kind of everlasting gift.

Humility has its signs. It also has its sinews and its ways, and these are as follows—poverty, withdrawal from the world, the concealment of one's wisdom, simplicity of speech, the seeking of alms, the disguising of one's nobility, the exclusion of free and easy relationships, the banishment of idle talk.

Nothing can ever so humble the soul as destitution and the subsistence of a beggar. We will show ourselves true lovers of wisdom and of God if we stubbornly run away from all possibility of aggrandizement.

If you wish to fight against some passion, take humility as your ally, for she will tread on the asp and the basilisk of sin and despair, and she will trample under foot the lion and the serpent of physical devilishness and cunning (cf Ps. 90:13).

Humility is a heavenly waterspout which can lift the soul from the abyss up to heaven's height.

Someone discovered in his heart how beautiful humility is, and in his amazement he asked her to reveal her parent's name. Humility smiled, joyous and serene: "Why are you in such a rush to learn the name of my begetter? He has no name, nor will I reveal him to you until you have God for your possession. To Whom be glory forever." Amen.

The sea is the source of the fountain, and humility is the source of discernment.

Step 26

ON DISCERNMENT

Among beginners, discernment is real self-knowledge; among those midway along the road to perfection, it is a spiritual capacity to distinguish unflinchingly between what is truly good and what in nature is opposed to the good; among the perfect, it is a knowledge resulting from divine illumination, which with its lamp can light up what is dark in others. To put the matter generally, discernment is—and is recognized to be—a solid understanding of the will of God in all times, in all places, in all things; and it is found only among those who are pure in heart, in body, and in speech.

The man who has devoutly destroyed within himself the three has also destroyed the five.⁹⁴ If he has neglected any of the former, then he will not be able to overcome even a single passion.

Discernment is an uncorrupted conscience. It is pure perception.

No one seeing or hearing something in monastic life that has a force over and beyond nature should, out of ignorance, become unbelieving. For much that is supernatural happens where the supernatural God abides.

Every demonic upheaval within us arises from the following three related causes, namely, carelessness, pride, or the envy of de-

⁹⁴ According to Evagrius (*Pbil.*, p.38), the three principal evil thoughts are gluttony, vainglory and avarice; these give rise to the other five, lust, despondency, pride, dejection and anger. Cf. Climacus, 26 (1021C), p. 235; also the Preface, p. 64.