

CONCERNING PRIDE

—from the book *The Salvation of Sinners*—

Pride is the root and source of every sin. St. Gregory the Diologist refers to pride as “the queen of all sins.” Whereas St. Isidor states that pride “eradicates every existing virtue.”

Man is endowed with an array of spiritual virtues, physical attributes, and material goods. Examples of spiritual gifts are the grace of God, the gift of prophecy, and the ability to perform miracles. Qualities that we possess naturally include intelligence, beauty, and strength. Forms of worldly prosperity we commonly attain are wealth, honor, and social status. When, however, we do not understand that the Lord is He Who grants all these good traits and qualities to whomever He wants, as He wants, when He wants, and for as long as He wills, we begin to enter the realm of pride, which, according to St. Gregory, consists of five distinct stages.

The first stage is when a person who possesses spiritual, physical, or material gifts does not comprehend that he received them from God, but rather believes that they are the result of his own efforts. The second stage is when a person realizes that every good thing he possesses has been given to him by God; however, he does not consider them to be a free gift but something that he justifiably deserves on account of his own merit. The third stage is when someone imagines he possesses virtues that he, in fact, does not have. The fourth stage of pride is when someone looks down on others (who he regards as inferior), and, believing that he is more deserving than others, desires honor and recognition for himself. The fifth and final stage of pride is when a person does not observe and altogether ignores the sacred laws that have been established by the holy Fathers, and rejects the sacred traditions of the Church (such as fasting, for example). All of these stages are sinful; however, the fifth type of pride is worst because a person in this state, in a way, blatantly disregards and disdains God, the Master and King Who appointed the divine laws.

Just as humility is a trait of God’s select servants and a certain sign that they are destined to delight in His Heavenly Kingdom, similarly pride is a characteristic of people who will be condemned and indisputable testimony that they will be put to shame and punished eternally in Hell. For as Christ stated, **“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Lk. 18:14)**.

Translated by

ST. NEKTARIOS MONASTERY

—ROSCOE, NY—

The more you boast and gloat in your accomplishments, the more you will be disdained and ignored by God, Who opposes the proud, and Who disperses the minds and hearts of all who are conceited: “**He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts**” (Lk. 1:51). Humility is the greatest of all gifts; conversely, pride stands as an obstacle to all good things, and it serves as the root of all transgressions.

In order for this evil to be cured, the Lord oftentimes permits us to fall into grave mistakes and commit serious sins. Our all-wise Physician would certainly not permit this to take place if pride was not the worst and most severe of all wrongdoings. The Prophet and King David once asserted pridefully, “**I said in my prosperity I will never be shaken**” (Ps. 29:7); that is to say, “I will not sin.” And so, in order to humble him and cure him of this pride, the Lord consequently permitted the prophet to commit adultery and murder. When the Lord foretold the Apostles that they would all abandon Him and flee as soon as the Jews apprehended Him, the Apostle Peter boasted in this manner: “Even if all the other Apostles abandon You, I will never leave you—even if I have to lay down my life for Your love.” (cf. Mt. 26:33-35). On account of this haughtiness, the Lord permitted Peter to deny Him three times, so that he may subsequently humble himself, lament his weakness, and no longer think highly of himself. Similarly, many virtuous hermits dwelling in the desert, who cast out demons from people and performed awesome signs and miracles later fell into grave and terrible sins. Whoever reads such accounts will be startled and certainly humble himself wholeheartedly.

Since the Lord permits people to fall into such sins in order to cure their pride, it is obvious that pride is the worst of all sins. Oftentimes, God also permits people to be falsely accused and slandered for crimes they have not committed in order to make them more humble. Additionally, He may send them various sorrows so that they do not end up becoming prideful, just as the Apostle Paul attests: “There was given to me an angel of Satan to flog me, so that I do not boast on account of the many revelations I have received” (cf. 2Cor. 12:7).

During the battle of virtue against sin, whenever a certain virtue starts gaining ground all our weaknesses begin to retreat—except for pride. It stays behind and wages war against us until our very last breath. Once you have vanquished all of the evil passions, prepare yourself to battle against vainglory; for, if you are overcome by her, you have accomplished nothing. If you happen to exercise chastity, abstinence, almsgiving, and other innumerable virtues, this is when you should especially guard yourself

diligently from pride; for, as we have mentioned, it never distances itself from a person but battles him up until the moment of death, at a time when all the other passions are no longer active. If we do not protect ourselves from pride, we will loose everything we have achieved, and all our efforts will go to waste. This is what happened to the Pharisee who had acquired many different virtues: when he was subsequently overcome by pride, this wretched man was condemned as he departed from the temple. **“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers ... I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess ... ‘I tell you [says Christ], this man [the Publican] went down to his house justified rather than the other [the Pharisee]: for every one that exalts himself shall be humbled; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted”** (Lk. 18:11-14). Not only he, but also many other virtuous friends of God and renowned hermits lost the fruits of their labors. After passing all of their lives in the desert, after limiting their diet to wild vegetation, dry rusks, and water, after depriving themselves of any and all bodily consolation, they later were condemned and lost their salvation on account of pride.

Eleazer once accomplished a phenomenal feat and victory by slaying an elephant. However, as this massive animal dropped to the ground it killed its killer, who was crushed to death underneath the weight of the mammoth animal. **“Which done, he crept under the elephant, and thrust him under, and slew him: whereupon the elephant fell down upon him, and there he died”** (1 Maccabees 6:46 LXA). This happened because he did not take the precautions necessary to guard himself. Similarly, when you happen to mortify a certain sin, imagine that you have just killed a beast; but if you are not careful and do not quickly run away from pride and vainglory, your victory will end up killing you. From a champion you will suddenly become a loser, and you will inadvertently bring about your own death.

Christ, Who is meek and humble in heart, exceedingly despises and loathes pride, and He brings her down from her high throne and, instead, elevates them who are humble. He humbled the Apostle Peter through a young girl. He humbled Goliath through David, who at the time was a young lad but nonetheless surprisingly killed this giant warrior. He humbled Holofernes when a frail maiden proceeded to cut his head off. He exiled Adam from Paradise. He deprived Saul and Rehoboam of their kingdoms. He put to death one hundred and twenty five thousand of Sennacherib people. He submerged the Pharaoh and all his soldiers in the depths of the Red Sea. The all-good and compassionate Lord similarly disciplined

countless other prideful people with bitter death. As a matter of fact, He not only disciplines humans but even exiled from Heaven itself all the Angels who gave in to arrogance, and He condemned them to eternal Hell.

Pride turned the Angels into demons; humility renders man a god. Guard yourself and be careful never to think highly of yourself, because you do not have even one single reason to boast. We were conceived in transgression; we were born in sin: "**For behold, I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother bear me**" (Ps. 50:5). Our entire lives are filled with sorrows and difficulties, and death is inevitable. "For we are earth, and to the earth we shall return." If you ponder that your body is dirt and ashes, if you bring to mind the decomposing grave that will bring your earthly glory and honor to an end, and if you consider how much pride actually harms you, you will feel an absolute repulsion for it.

If you consider the putrid smell of the soil and the maggots that your body will succumb to in the grave, and if you take into account that the people who you presently look down upon and scorn will one day be stepping on your burial plot, you would not feel prideful. Just as it is not possible for someone who has been sentenced to death to feel prideful, similarly it is strange for us to be prideful and boast since we also are subjected to the verdict of Adam's transgression: "**The day you eat from this, you will die with death**" (Gen. 2:17).

If you are inclined to feel prideful on account of your virtue, intelligence, or any other special gifts you believe you possess, remember that they are all free handouts that the Lord has given to you, for which you will have to give an account on Judgment Day. For as it is written, "**they who are mighty will be mightily examined**" (Wisdom 6:6). All the various virtues are gifts from our infinitely-good God. The more you surpass others, whether it be in physical attributes such as social status, wisdom, valor, physical strength, and wealth, or in spiritual qualities such as chastity, abstinence, and righteousness, the more you must humble yourself—because all these are bestowals that come from above from the Father of lights. The only things that belong to us are our sins and crimes; and if we choose to pride ourselves on account of these, then we are indeed foolish and senseless.

Open your eyes and examine yourself, and you will observe many reasons to humble yourself and to fear God's just judgment that awaits all of us. Whoever comes to know himself will certainly humble himself; for self-knowledge is an effective and beneficial medicine that acts against pride, which is more of a demonic sin than a human sin. When the prideful spirits

took pleasure in their beauty and nobility they rose up against God in Heaven. We, the earthly worms who live in exile and the valley of tears, similarly mimic the devil and the demons when we act haughtily and pridefully before God—despite the fact that we have more reasons than the prideful angels did to humble ourselves. Let this be your first lesson against pride: The merciful and compassionate Lord abhors pride to such an extent that He did not allow the angels to go unpunished but exiled them from Heaven eternally. What then will happen to us, the unworthy worms, if we allow ourselves to see overcome by this sin?

Examine your shortcomings (for the study of our weaknesses reveals to us who we truly are in soul and body), and you will discover numerous reasons to be ashamed of yourself rather than to boast. Comprehend that your body has been formed from worthless soil and humble earth, and identify the innumerable sins that you have committed with your soul. The more carefully you examine yourself, the more you will realize how unworthy you are, and you will certainly humble yourself.

If you feel you have certain virtues that others lack, you should understand that these same people oftentimes surpass you in other virtues. For example, you may fast and work harder than someone else, but that person may have more love and patience than you—virtues that happen to be more pleasing to God than your fasting. If you compare your sins with other peoples' virtues, this will always preserve you in humility and foster the desire to correct yourself. Thus you will be liberated from the wind of pride, which prevents us from attaining salvation and acquiring Divine grace.

Pride is a tree that has been planted and watered by the devil. Pride's branches grow straight up, they extend very high and look appealing; however, they are frail, and the higher you climb, the harder you will end up falling. Everyone loves the humble person, regardless of the shortcomings he may happen to have. The humble person defeats his enraged opponent with patience, and the prideful opponent with his humility. The Lord exalts people who humble themselves instead of people who desire and seek praise and recognition. The Lord exalted Jacob more than Esau. He exalted Joseph more than his brothers; Anna more than Phennana; David more than Saul; the publican more than the Pharisee; poor Lazarus more than the rich man. But more than anyone else, He highly exalted our Lord Jesus Christ, Who willingly humbled Himself more than anyone else.

If you want to be exalted with eternal glory, this should be your final and most useful rule: to mimic as much as possible our Lord. Bring to mind that the Son and Word of God became a humble human being in order to

cure the horrible wound of pride. What an unfathomable miracle! God humbled Himself to such an extent! He was born in a cave, He was laid in a manger, He went through his earthly life in extreme poverty, He was despised and disdained, He washed the feet of His disciples. And finally, after He was scorned, cursed, slapped, and spat upon, He endured a brutal and humiliating death. They who foolishly relish in their pride should be ashamed and embarrassed for not following Christ's divine example. What more could the all-good Lord have done for our salvation? Therefore, mimic your Master. Develop a hatred for pride and desire humility—for without her, every virtue has no value.

Choose to hold company with humble people, prefer to sit in the last seat, willingly carry out the most-humble jobs. Never say or do something in order to show that you are better than others. Simply said, you must mimic as much as possible your Master Christ, the Virgin Mary, and all the Saints who lived their lives with extreme humility. The more fruit-bearing trees are filled with large fruit, the heavier their branches become and the more their branches bend toward the earth. Something similar occurs with the faithful servants of God: The more blessings and grace they receive from God, the more they comprehend just how indebted they are to Him, and the more virtuous they become the more they humble themselves. The Lord Himself said that when we have carried out everything that He has commanded us to do, we should confess that we are useless slaves and we have merely done what we were obligated to do (vid. Lk. 17:10).

If the glorious Godhead humbled Himself to the point of death, why should human weakness puff up so much? Abel was an example of innocence. Enoch was an example of purity. Noah served as a model of hope. Abraham taught us obedience and hospitality. Jacob instructed us in longsuffering. The all-comely Joseph was an example of chastity. Job was a paradigm of patience. David showed us how to love our enemies, and Elijah was a display of divine zeal. However, the Son of God came to teach us humility: "**Learn from Me;**" He declares, "**that I am meek and humble in heart**" (Mt. 11:29). He, of course, instructed us in all the virtues; however, He encourages us to humility more than anything else, for humility is the vessel and secure vault that contains all the other virtues.