

III. Humility

Humility is a virtue which inspires us with low sentiments of ourselves; it attributes to us our just due.

It makes us realize what we are, according to these words of the Apostle; "*What have you that you have not received? And if you have received it, why glory in it?*" (1 Cor. 4:7). Thus, it directly opposes pride which gives us an unjustly exalted notion of our own excellence; yet in truth this vice does not indicate any solid good in us, for it is only a swelling which puffs us up and makes us appear in our judgment greater than we really are.

Our divine Savior teaches us the necessity of this virtue when He tells us: "Unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of God." (Matt. 18:3). This terrifying threat applies most especially to those who are in charge of instructing youth.

Now, which are the true characteristics of the humility proper to our state, considering it as the function of teaching? We shall explain this now.

1) The humility of a good teacher must be Christian. Hence he will be faithful to what he owes God and to what he owes his neighbor, not only his superiors, but also his equals and his inferiors. Thus, a Brother who may be the first among others should carefully refrain from exacting, and even (on the pretext that he is placed above them) from tolerating that others should render him any base or lowly services that he can do for himself. If he demanded such services he would be acting very contrary to humility. A good teacher will be humble in mind, knowing full well his own insufficiencies; he will be humble of heart, loving his lowliness; he will be humble in action, by behaving in consequence in all he does.

No doubt, he will never lose sight of the excellence and nobility of the end for which he was created; but at the same time he will keep in view the wretched state in which he is as a consequence of the sin of the first man: obscurity in his understanding, which even if not total, is still very notable; still greater weakness in his will, real powerlessness to do any supernatural good without God's help. Such is the sad inheritance of human nature, as religion teaches us. He does know, of course that God will never abandon him in his need, unless he has first abandoned God. But even when he thinks "that he stands" must he not always fear "lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12)? And consequently, must he not work out his salvation with fear and trembling, without being able to find reassurance save in these beautiful words of St. Peter the Apostle: "*Labor the more, that by your good works you may make sure your calling and election.*" (2 Peter 1:10,11).

2) Humility is accompanied by modesty. Thus, a teacher who really possesses this virtue considers himself highly honored to labor at the salvation of souls following the example of Jesus Christ and of the Apostles, in a role which a great number of the Saints who have made the Church illustrious by their lights, and edified by their virtues, have gloried in.

If he is talented, he does not make a display of it; he does not show conceit, pride, overbearing manners; he avoids attitudes and gestures, airs and ways of acting that might make him conspicuous in the eyes of men, or might draw attention to the qualities he thinks he possesses. He takes no pleasure in his wit, in the knowledge he may have acquired. With all the more reason he does not look down on his Brothers nor on what they do. He does not seek to be praised for what he does, nor applauded for his success; he does not attribute to himself

the glory which is due only to the One who distributes talents as He sees fit; he refers all such esteem to God alone (1 Tim. 1:17). If he does not always achieve among his pupils all the good he hoped for, and even if he does no good at all, he blames himself, seeking to know what he did wrong, so as to correct it. After this, he remains in peace, submissive to Providence, knowing that it is not he who plants nor he who waters, but God who gives increase.

3) Humility excludes all vainglory as a motive of acting. Nothing, in fact, is more silly than to desire the esteem of men; it is, says Pierre de Blois, “a burning wind which dries up the rivulets of grace.” Such a desire is, moreover, incompatible with the principles of the Gospel. Jesus Christ said to his disciples: “Do not desire to be called master, nor to be greeted as teachers. It matters little for you to be known by men. What you do need is that your names be written in heaven.” (Matt. 23:10; Luke 10:20).

4) Humility is without ambition. Since a truly humble Brother thinks himself fit for very little, he does not seek more exalted positions or employments. He does not want to teach one class rather than another, but convinces himself that the class to which he has been assigned by obedience is better for him than any other, will provide him with more means of glorifying God, and draw down on him more graces to use those means properly as far as possible.

5) Humility eliminates jealousy. A humble Brother, far from feeling chagrin over the achievements and success enjoyed by others in the same type of work will, on the contrary, be pleased to see that they equal and even surpass him; that they succeed better than he in teaching. Thus, he will never try to put himself forward as having more merit than another. Nor will he allow himself to display coldness toward others who may be ranked above him; in the same way he will not nourish any bitterness toward those who classify him below other Brothers.

6) Humility is not overconfident about its own views. Thus, if a Brother truly possesses this virtue, he will conform to the principles established in the Institute regarding teaching; he will not insist on following his own ideas; he will go along with his confrères; he will preserve uniformity of conduct in their regard; he will not make use of any special methods, any extraordinary practices to teach in his own way, keeping in mind the harm that might be done to the students as a result, and the difficulties he might create for the teachers who would come after him. Since he is not rash in what he does, he seeks to reassure himself by relying on the expertise of others; he consults them, willingly accepts their advice, warnings, instructions; in a word everything that might help him to do a better job.

7) Humility makes a teacher glad to share his knowledge with the simple. He shows great zeal in evangelizing the poor, in instructing the ignorant, and in teaching children the basics of religion. But if his knowledge is not accompanied by humility he will readily turn aside from those areas of teaching which are less highly considered, even though they may well be the most useful.

8) The humility of a good teacher makes him courageous. He does not turn away from whatever may be lowly and uninviting in the schools and in the students. He welcomes them with kindness and mildness; without showing any distaste he puts up with their natural defects:

their rudeness, their ineptitude, the flaws in their character. He patiently bears with their indocility, impoliteness, ingratitude, oppositions, and even insults, without yielding to resentment or revenge, even when these faults are directed at him personally. Still, he does not forget that he must always repress whatever might weaken his authority and give rise to disorder, insolence, lack of application, or to other forms of misconduct on the part of the students.

9) Humility makes a good teacher treat both his equals and his inferiors with esteem, cordiality, friendliness, and kindness.

10) Humility makes a good teacher endure without chagrin the confusion that his mistakes, his blunders, his lack of success may draw down on him. The students can only be edified by his example on such occasions, and be led to imitate it themselves later on, when they find themselves in like circumstances.

11) The humility of a good teacher makes him charitable, affable, obliging, easy to approach, especially by the poor and those whom he might find less interesting to deal with. Never does he assume, when addressing the students, an arrogant, disdainful, or scornful attitude.

12) Finally, besides the defects of which we have been speaking, humility also condemns in general these that follow: lack of tact, indifference toward others, self-importance, affected and pretentious ways of acting toward Brothers or students; egotism which leads the teacher to concern himself only with his own person and which is nothing but false humility; this is especially to be condemned in the case when, fearing to fail, he refrains from making all the efforts that the glory of God and obedience demands. The good teacher avoids the spirit of independence, which makes him follow none but his own ideas, and refuses to be subordinate to anyone in the exercise of his employment. Thus, only reluctantly does one show to a visitor, Director, or an Inspector, the marks of common politeness and courtesy due to them such as asking them to take the teacher's chair during class, finding out from them what they would like one to do, accompanying them in order to answer their questions, explaining to them whatever they might wish to know; showing them the students' copybooks, and receiving their observations and their advice.

"Humiliation will follow the proud man, and the glory will be the lot of the man who is humble of spirit." (Prov. 29:23)

"That each through humility believe others more important than himself." (Phil 2:3).