# 111. Humility of Heart

**By Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.**

1. Jesus expressed Himself only once in these words: “Learn of Me,” and this was when He was speaking of humility. “Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Matt. 11:29). Knowing how much the practice of real humility would cost our proud nature, He seemed to want to give us special encouragement. The example He gave in the extraordinary humiliations which made Him “the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people” (Ps. 21:7), those humiliations by which, out of love for men, He was “made sin” (2 Cor. 5:21) and the bearer of all our iniquities, even to being “reputed with the wicked” (Mark 15:28), is certainly the strongest stimulus and the most urgent invitation to the practice of humility.

Jesus speaks directly to us about humility of heart, because every virtue, every reform of life, if it is to be sincere, must come from the heart, whence come our thoughts and our actions. The exterior attitude and the humility of our words are useless unless accompanied by lowliness of heart; many times they are but the mask of a refined—and therefore all the most dangerous—pride. “First make clean the inside,” said Jesus when He was branding the Pharisees’ hypocrisy, “that the outside may become clean” (Matt. 23:26). St. Thomas teaches that “an interior disposition to humility puts its seal upon the words, gestures, and acts, by means of which that which is hidden within is manifested on the outside” (*Summa* II-II, q. 161, a. 6).

Therefore, to be truly humble, we must apply ourselves first of all to humility of heart and continue to deepen the sincere recognition of our nothingness, of our weakness. Let us acknowledge our faults and failings without trying to assign any other cause for them than our misery; let us recognize the good that is in us as a pure gift of God and never claim it for our own.

2. Humility of heart is a virtue which is at the same time both difficult and easy. It involves hardship because it is totally opposed to pride, which is always urging us to exalt ourselves; it is easy because we do not have to look very far to find grounds for it; we find them—and how abundantly—in ourselves, in our own misery. However, it does not suffice to be wretched in order to be humble—only he is humble who sincerely acknowledges his own unworthiness and acts accordingly.

Man, proud by nature, cannot reach this acknowledgement without God’s grace, but since God never refuses necessary grace to anyone, we have only to turn to Him and ask Him with confidence and perseverance for humility of heart. Let us ask for it in the Name of Jesus

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Who humbled Himself so much for the glory of His Father and for our salvation; “ask for it in His Name, and you will receive it” (cf. John 16:24). If in spite of our sincere desire to become humble, movements of pride, vain glory, or idle complacency arise in us, we must not become discouraged, but know and admit that they are the fruit of our fallen nature and use them as a new motive for abasing ourselves.

We should remember that we can practice humility of heart, even when we are not able to perform special exterior acts of humility, even when no one humiliates us and we are, on the contrary, the object of confidence, esteem, and praise. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus said in like circumstances: “The remembrance of my weakness is so constantly present to me that there is no room for vanity” (*Story of a Soul*, 11). Let us remember, then, that “reproaches do not make us more guilty, and neither does praise add anything to our holiness” (*Imitation of Christ* II, 6, 3). We must humble ourselves within, the more we are praised by others. If humility of heart is practiced in this way, it will give us such a low opinion of ourselves that we will not be able to prefer ourselves to anyone; we will consider others better and more worthy of esteem, respect, and consideration than we are. Thus we will be in peace, undisturbed by the desire to be better than others, undisturbed by the humiliations which may come to us. The fruit of humility is interior peace, for Jesus has said: “Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls” (Matt. 11:29).

*Text taken from* Divine Intimacy *(Baronius Press, 2015), pp. 315-317.*

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