



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 22 May 2024

[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Cycle of Catechesis. Vices and Virtues. 20. *Humility*

We will conclude this series of catecheses by looking at a virtue which is not part of the seven cardinal and theological virtues, but which is at the base of Christian life. This virtue is *humility*, the great antagonist of the most mortal of sins, namely pride. Whereas pride and arrogance swell the human heart, making us appear to be more than we are, humility restores everything to its correct dimension: we are wonderful creatures, but we are limited, with qualities and flaws. From the beginning, the Bible reminds us that we are dust, and to dust we shall return (cf. *Gen 3:19*); indeed, “humble” derives from *humus*, that is, earth. And yet delusions of omnipotence, which are so dangerous, often arise in the human heart, and this does us a great deal of harm.

It takes very little to free ourselves from the demon of pride. Contemplating a starry sky is enough to restore the correct measure, as the Psalm says: “When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?” (8:3-4). Modern science enables us to extend the horizon much, much farther, and to feel the mystery that surrounds us and inhabits us, even more [intensely].

Blessed are the people who guard this perception of their smallness in their heart! These people are shielded from an ugly vice: arrogance. In his Beatitudes, Jesus leads precisely with them: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven” (*Mt 5:3*). It is the first Beatitude because it is at the base of the ones that follow: indeed, meekness, mercy and purity of heart stem from that inner sense of smallness. Humility is the gateway to all the virtues.

In the first pages of the Gospels, humility and poverty of spirit seem to be the source of everything. The angel’s announcement does not happen at Jerusalem’s doors, but in a remote village in Galilee, that was so insignificant that people used to say, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (*Jn 1:46*). But it is precisely from there that the world was reborn. The chosen heroine was not a little princess who grew up coddled, but an unknown girl: Mary. She was the first one to be astonished when the angel delivered God’s announcement to her. And her wonder stands out in her song of praise: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for *he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden*” (*Lk 1:46-48*). God is — so to speak — attracted by Mary’s smallness, which is above all an inner smallness. And he is also attracted by our smallness, when we accept it. She certainly had many other qualities, which appear a few at a time throughout the Gospels’ narrative, but this is the only one that is named: humility.

From then on, Mary was careful not to take centre stage. Her first decision after the angelic annunciation was to go and help, to go and serve her cousin. Mary headed towards the mountains of Judea to visit Elizabeth: she assisted her in the last months of her pregnancy. But who saw this gesture? No one, other than God. The Virgin did not seem to ever want to emerge from this concealment. Just as when a woman’s voice from the crowd proclaims her blessedness: “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!” (*Lk 11:27*). But Jesus immediately replies: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (*Lk 11:28*). Not even the most sacred truth of her life — being the Mother of God — became a reason for her to boast before mankind. In a world marked by the pursuit of appearance, of flaunting one’s superiority over others, Mary walks decisively, by the sole power of God’s grace, in the opposite direction.

We can imagine that she too experienced difficult moments, days when her faith advanced in darkness. But this never made her humility waver, which in Mary was a rock-solid virtue. I want to highlight this: humility is a rock-solid virtue. Let us think of Mary: she was always small, always without self-importance, always free of ambition. This smallness of hers was her invincible strength: it was she who remained at the foot of the cross, while the illusion of a triumphant Messiah was being shattered. In the days leading up to Pentecost, it was Mary who gathered up the flock of disciples, after they had been unable to keep vigil over Jesus for just one hour, and had abandoned him when the storm came.

Brothers and sisters, humility is everything. It is what saves us from the Evil One, and from the danger of becoming his accomplices. And humility is the source of peace in the world and in the Church. Where there is no humility, there is war, there is discord, there is division. God has given

us an example of [humility] in Jesus and Mary, so that it may be our salvation and happiness. And humility is precisely the way, the path to salvation. Thank you!

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from South Africa, Hong Kong, India, South Korea, the Philippines, and the United States of America. I invoke upon you and your families the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Lastly, my thoughts turn to the sick, to the elderly, to newlyweds and to young people, especially the students from Frattamaggiore and from Angri. May the Holy Spirit, whose presence in the Church we remembered recently on the Solemnity of Pentecost, always live in your hearts, and help you to be strong in Faith, generous in Charity, and persevering in Hope.

Let us pray for peace. We need peace. The world is at war. Let us not forget martyred Ukraine, which is suffering a great deal. Let us not forget Palestine and Israel: may this war stop. Let us not forget Myanmar. And let us not forget the many countries at war. Brothers and sisters, we must pray for peace in this time of war all over the world.

May the Lord bless you, may Our Lady guard you; please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

We now conclude our cycle of catecheses on the virtues by reflecting on the virtue of humility, by which we acknowledge that we are creatures of God and strive to live accordingly. Humility is in fact the door to the other virtues and, with poverty of spirit, the first of the Beatitudes. We see this in a particular way in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her humility is seen not only in joyful acceptance of the Lord's will, but also in charity toward her cousin Elizabeth, in perseverance beneath the cross, and in her prayerful presence among the Apostles in the Upper Room, as they awaited the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. May her example and powerful intercession help us to overcome our temptations to pride, to follow humbly in the footsteps of Jesus, and to bear witness to the joy and peace of his Kingdom.

Let us pray for peace. We need peace. The world is at war. Let us not forget tormented Ukraine, which is suffering a great deal. Let us not forget Palestine and Israel: may it stop, this war. Let us not forget Myanmar. And let us not forget the many countries at war. Brothers and sisters, we

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