

“The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” These are the powerful words of our Lord Jesus from today’s Gospel that truly bear repeating. Whenever the Evangelists record Jesus condemning the hypocritical behavior of many of the scribes and Pharisees, there seems to be a common thread behind their hypocrisy—and that is that they were *more concerned* with their own image, status, reputation, and power than they were about actually fulfilling the Law and loving God and their neighbor with a sincere heart.

The scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus condemns were *obsessed* with themselves and it seems as if these self-proclaimed religious leaders had begun to worship the false gods of image, status, reputation, and power, all of which have their origin in pride, which is one of the 7 deadly sins. “Pride” may be defined as an *inordinate and undue* self-esteem or self-love which constantly seeks attention and honor and sets oneself in competition with God and others.

The great Jesuit theologian Fr. John Hardon elaborates on the meaning of pride stating that, “It [pride] is inordinate because it is

*contrary to the truth*. It is essentially an act or disposition of the will desiring to be *considered better than a person really is*. Pride may be expressed in different ways: by taking personal credit for gifts or possessions, as if they had not been received from God; by glorying in achievements, as if they were not primarily the result of divine goodness and grace; by minimizing one's defects or claiming qualities that are not actually possessed; by holding oneself superior to others or disdainning them because they lack what the proud person has; by magnifying the defects of others or dwelling on them.”

Fr. Hardon goes on to say that, “When pride is carried to the extent that a person is *unwilling* to acknowledge dependence on God and refuses to submit his or her will to God or lawful authority, it is a grave sin. The gravity arises from the fact that a person shows contempt for God or of those who take his place.”

I would also argue that, social media, which is not intrinsically evil in and of itself, can exacerbate temptations to sins of pride by fostering a certain narcissism where one strives to create a false image of oneself for the sake of impressing others, bragging to others, and making oneself

feel superior to others. Social media can seriously be abused as a platform for sinful pride, where all that matters is one's own image, reputation, status, and power.

Moreover, the fallenness of our popular culture indoctrinates us to worship the false gods of image, reputation, status, and power where fame and glory must be pursued at all costs. This cultural indoctrination is driven mostly by the entertainment industry and the “cult of celebrity,” which sees money, power, and image, as the “almighty idols” that can give us true happiness.

Brothers and sisters, *in no way*, does pride help us to become a more loving, more patient, more merciful, or more compassionate human being—let alone a better, more faithful disciple of Christ. Pride is ultimately a false promise of happiness that in no way leads to true and lasting fulfillment of one's deepest desires.

In today's Gospel, our merciful Savior offers us another way—a better way. Indeed, the antidote to pride is *humility* – the virtue that Jesus so strongly espouses and the virtue that He so wonderfully embodies. Humility may be defined as the moral virtue by which one

acknowledges that God as our loving Father is the author of all goodness and that everything we have is from Him and for Him.

Humility is rooted in honesty and self-awareness and therefore it's defined by a just love of self that's based on a true appreciation of one's position with respect to God and neighbor. Humility recognizes one's need for total dependence on God our Heavenly Father, as well as one's creaturely equality with others. Humility causes one to rejoice in the fact that one has been lovingly created and redeemed by the all-powerful goodness and mercy of God our Father.

Brothers and sisters, *all of us*, at one time or another, struggle against sins of pride. And so all of us need periodic check-ups in the "humility department." That being said, given today's Gospel, we should challenge ourselves with the following questions: Am I willing to admit that I'm wrong and others are right when the facts and the truth are not on my side? Or am I insecure with displaying weakness and vulnerability? Do I take myself so seriously and view myself so highly that I can't laugh at myself or have a healthy sense of humor? Do I constantly seek to assert myself above others for the sake of "feeling

superior” and having power and control? Do I over-exaggerate my own perceived “goodness” and do I deliberately ignore and refuse to sincerely acknowledge my own sinfulness in accordance with an honest examination of conscience?

Am I more concerned with image, status, reputation, and power, than I am with loving God and neighbor? Am I willing to do anything for personal gain and power, even if that means stepping on others and actively putting them down? Do I refuse to praise or commend others when they truly deserve it? Do I rush to take credit for things or do I give credit to others where credit is due? Do I have an over-inflated sense of self and am I trying to create a false persona using social media? Do I use social media in a virtuous and prudent manner that seeks the good of others, as well as the glory of God, and not myself?

As we prepare to worship and receive our merciful Savior in the Most Holy Eucharist, let’s ask the Lord for the grace to grow in humility so that we may sincerely love God and others with every fiber of our being and truly live as authentic and faithful witnesses of Christ.