

INSCAPE November 2014

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and the communion of the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

THE PRACTICE OF HUMILITY

If there is one truth that Jesus lived by and taught his disciples, it is that love is proved by deeds. We can act lovingly by forgetting ourselves and living for the good of others only if our inner person is transformed into an integrated being. When we are thus made whole, we become ever more conscious of the Trinity's infinite love for us. Deeds then flow, not out of any obligation or for an ulterior motive, but rather out of our living at the core of our being. There, God's uncreated energies of love are ever actively loving us into persons who in turn love others as they love themselves.

Out of the same transformation effected by the Holy Spirit, humility likewise brings forth humble acts toward other persons in thoughts, words and deeds. The importance of genuine humility as the foundation of our spiritual life can therefore not remain solely in our intellectual understanding.

It needs to be enlivened by our external actions toward God and neighbor. Thus, even these external actions are movements of the Spirit. They inspire us to "act" humbly and to influence our soul and spirit to grow even further in humility.

We need to go beyond any mere interior or exterior posturing as the Pharisee displays before God and the tax collector in Jesus' parable (Luke 18:9-14). Humility before God whom we cannot see is not authentic and transforming unless it is manifested in attitudes and actions toward our neighbor.

This is what St. Paul consistently taught. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another" (Romans 12:10). "Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil; but is happy with the Truth. **Love never gives up**; and its faith, hope and patience **never fail**" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). "We must not be proud or irritate one another or be jealous of one another" (Galatians 5:26). "Do not do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves. And look out for one another's interest, not just for your own" (Philippians 2:3-4). "Be always humble, gentle and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another" (Ephesians 4:2-3). "Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

LEARN OF ME, GENTLE AND HUMBLE

Jesus insisted that we learn to live as he did. He was gentle and humble of heart before his heavenly Father and all who came into his life. He who was the master washed the feet of his disciples, his servants. He insisted that we do the same: "I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you...Now that you know this truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice" (John 13:15,17)!

Jesus gave us a new commandment of love that cannot be fulfilled without humility. "My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them" (John 15:12-13). Here Jesus teaches us the intimate relationship between true love and authentic humility. They cannot be separated from

each other, yet they are two distinct virtues. They are born of the same source, the Holy Spirit. Both give God complete preference over all else. Both come out of adoration, worship and reverence.

Love finds God by stretching out toward him. Humility meets God in the depths of our human lowliness. Both manifest total detachment from all created beings, only to find their true worth in God. The common aim of love and humility is to do all for God's greater glory.

"Love says: 'How beautiful God is!' Humility responds: 'Beside him, how vile I am!' Love says: 'See he is as good as he is beautiful. He takes no account of our littleness.'"

FIRST STEP TO HUMILITY: TRUE SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Who we are before God and neighbor is determined by the quality of our thoughts, words and deeds. We come to know ourselves and how humble and loving we really are by understanding our interior motivation as we relate to God and to others in all situations. Not to know ourselves as objectively as God knows us, is to live in a world which our pride has constructed and which has no objective reality to its illusions.

This self-knowledge comes from the Holy Spirit's gifts of knowledge, understanding and wisdom (1 Corinthians 12:8). We receive courage to see the good and beautiful that we bring forth as gifts from God. Yet, with our humble cooperation we turn all to God's greater glory.

But the Spirit first urges us to embrace those dark areas of our miseries, weaknesses and past sins and cry out for the healing power of Jesus, our Saviour. He drives us into the desert of our hearts and calls us to a deeper conversion of our values to the values of Jesus Christ. Saint Jerome dramatically expressed this truth: "Go into this dunghill of your mean and abject condition, of your sins and miseries; there you shall find the precious pearls of humility."

Self-knowledge is the beginning and the necessary means to attain humility. For centuries the saints have proposed that we pray and meditate often to understand who we really are and have been in God's eyes. This understanding then helps us to increase in Christian love and humility in the future.

The saints also propose to understand our creatureliness by reflecting on our non-entity, our non-existence before we received the gift of life. God is the source of all existing created beings. We totally depend upon his gratuitous, creative acts, sharing with us the dignity to be made in his image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). Saint Paul also calls us to consider our nothingness in utter humility. He tells us not to pridefully think that we can exist without total dependence on God's gratuitous and creative power. It is God who wills us into being and sustains us in our existence. "If someone thinks he is something when he is really nothing, he is only deceiving himself" (Galatians 6:3). Jesus sternly reminds us "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who remains with me, and I with him, will bear abundant fruit; for without me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

SORROW FOR PAST SINS

When writing on how to acquire humility, all Christian writers recommend the necessity to remember with deepest compunction and sorrow the sins of our past. Saint Philotheus of Sinai well describes this consistent teaching of the early Church Fathers: "Guarding the intellect with the Lord's help requires much humility, first in relation to God and then in relation to other persons. We ought to do all we can to crush and humble the heart. To achieve this we should scrupulously remember our former life in the world, recalling and reviewing in detail all the sins we have committed since childhood.....This not only induces humility but also engenders tears and moves us to give heartfelt thanks to God. Perpetual and vivid mindfulness of death has the

same effect: it gives birth to grief accompanied by a certain sweetness and joy, and to watchfulness of intellect.”

Jesus said that non-existence would have been better for Judas than to have betrayed his master (Matthew 26:24). Yet each of us can see how many times we have been tempted and have succumbed with Eve to the temptation of being independent from God. God has been so good in granting us life and sustaining us for so many years, and yet how we have insulted God by rejecting his *Gift of Love*. “We were all like men unclean, all that integrity of ours like filthy clothing. We have all withered like leaves and our sins blew us away like the wind” (Isaiah 64: 5-6).

CONTEMPLATING JESUS ON THE CROSS

We can humbly say with David the penitent: “For I am well aware of my faults; I have my sin constantly in mind, having sinned against none other than you, having done what you regard as wrong” (Psalms 51:3-4). Yet, it is in contemplating the passion and death of Jesus that we begin to understand the evil of our sins. Jesus has freely accepted to bear them so that by his wounds we might be healed of our arrogant pride” (Isaiah 53:5).

Contemplating at the foot of the cross the Son of God suffering and dying, we develop a sorrow for our sins that is tempered and mingled with hope for pardon. We humbly cry out from the depths of our being: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” With Saint Paul, we too can believe by the Holy Spirit that Jesus has died for us (Galatians 2:19). And now we can accept God’s forgiving, merciful and compassionate love. We need no longer live in our pride but can live in Jesus-Saviour (Galatians 2:20).

Mark the Ascetic of the fifth century offers us the greatest reason for humility and the way to prevent prideful presumption with a true conversion from our sinfulness: “All the penalties imposed by divine judgment upon man for the sin of the first transgression---death, toil, hunger, thirst and the like---he took upon himself, becoming what we are, so that we might become what he is. The Logos (Word of God) became man, so that man might become Logos. Being abundantly rich, he became poor for our sakes, so that through his poverty we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). In his great love for us he became like us, so that through every virtue we might become like him.”

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

There can be no true growth in humility unless we turn habitually within ourselves. Here we reflect in a loving dialogue with the Indwelling Trinity on our motivation and value system that have been operating in every thought, word and deed in a given day. **This is not an easy task.** It demands daily attention, since our “false” self has build up over the years defenses insulating us from our true self, which lies deeply embedded within our conscious.

A very effective form of a daily examination of conscience for one seeking to attain humility through self-examination would always include the following: give thanks to God for all the many gifts received from him; ask in prayer to know your sins and be freed from them; give an account of all personal relationships, body and soul and spirit, experienced during the day; beg of God to forgive all your sins, deliberate and indeliberate; then resolve to amend your life (a true conversion) through the prompting and help of the Holy Spirit.

Through this simple exercise you will be able to move out into the material world and discover the *locus* of place of God’s presence. You will be served by your transcendent self-presence to the Trinity in true, humble love. God has no mouth to speak, yet he speaks his Word throughout all creation. He has no hand to grasp you and guide you, but you know God

touches you with his divine hand in the touch of each person whom you meet and touch each day.

FOCUS OF ATTENTION

Another traditional exercise for acquiring humility is to concentrate in meditation and throughout a given day on a specific facet of humility, which you might feel you are in a particular need to develop.

An essential aspect in developing the habit of humility is to bring under God's will the basically good desire to entertain a just and right esteem for self and to be esteemed and praised by others. You can gradually develop this habit with the power of the Holy Spirit. You do so by consciously and affectively returning throughout the day to the indwelling Trinity, by renewing your resolve to do everything for God's greater glory, and by checking at the end of the day on your progress.

The best way to live humbly as Jesus did is to call to mind as often as you can throughout a given day the indwelling presence in you of the Risen Lord Jesus. Perhaps you can recall this presence by using a breath-prayer such as, "You must increase; I must decrease" (John 3:30).

EXTERNAL SIGNS OF HUMILITY

The inner state of humility of Jesus and the saints is manifested through external signs. Before the majesty of God this occurred in prayer through bodily reverence. In relationship with others it is evident through their gestures, deeds and words. We realize how much the body can be not only the exterior expression of our inner humility, but also an influence on the soul and spirit, as we seek to *be* always humble before God and others.

We may be convinced of the importance of inner humility to fulfill the two great commands of loving God with our whole heart and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. But we fear to practice humility externally. Saint Basil of the fourth century says: "As sciences and arts are acquired by practice, so also are moral virtues. To be a good musician...you must practice the art a great deal, and in this way you will come out proficient in it. So also to gain the habit of humility and of the other moral virtues, you must practice their acts, and in this way you will gain them."

Saint Paul warns us: "It is not by hearing the Law that people are put right with God, but by doing what the Law commands" (Romans 2:13).

As we pointed out above, our bodies do influence the whole person on spirit, soul and body levels. Saint Augustine explains this in the light of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples: "But it is far better, and beyond all dispute more accordant with the truth, that it should also be done with the hands; nor should the Christian think it beneath him to do what was done by Christ. For when the body is bent at a brother's feet, the feeling of such humility is either awakened in the heart itself, or is strengthened if already present."

If we are aware of Augustine's principle that bodily actions influence the soul, then our actions like washing the feet of travelers, washing the bodies of the sick in hospitals or homes, feeding the poor, the sick and the dying, can become sacramental signs of our humility, performing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy as Jesus himself did and preached. "I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes; naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; in prison and you visited me...I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:35-40)!

There can, however, be the danger of hypocrisy in external practices of humility if these signs, gestures and words are insincere and instead of developing humility in us bring about more pride and self-centeredness.

THE FOLLY OF THE CROSS

How can we justify higher degrees of humility? It seemingly and imprudently is contrary not only to our personal instincts but even to reason itself. Does this not negate our basic goodness, always due to God's grace? Does God ask this of everyone? How can we even pray for such a generous humility and complete following of Christ when our entire nature resists the very thought?

Here we are entering into the essence of the suffering servant, Jesus Christ, who emptied himself of everything out of love for us, "to assume the condition of a slave...He was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). How powerfully Saint Paul grasped the love and humility of Jesus, who reveals it super-naturally to the little ones of this world: "Do you see now God has shown up the foolishness of human wisdom? If it was God's wisdom that human wisdom should not know God, it was because God wanted to save those who have faith through the foolishness of the message that we preach...to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power and wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Corinthians 1:20-25).

We can see that humility is not only the test of the authenticity of all our Christian virtues, but it is above all the central condition of our transformation and regeneration into Christ. This mode of humility in no way denigrates our human nature. It surely did not do so for the human Christ. Saint Paul saw Jesus' "emptying" of himself through ignominy and even abasement unto death, because Jesus was striving to image the face of his invisible Father. "But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as LORD, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

NEED FOR PRUDENCE

If humility and love evidence the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, then the same Holy Spirit will also guide us along the path of prudence [wisdom in practical affairs]. Prudence brings balance between the two extremes: excess that lessens God's creation and his gifts in us, and too much *cautiousness* that all too often is a disguise for rank pride. As we prefer others to ourselves, prudence [good judgment or common sense] shows us that self-effacing humility does not change what we are but only what we seem to be through our sinful pride. It opposes anything that would diminish our personality and lower our moral worth. Prudence balances under the Holy Spirit a sense of beauty and righteous justice, essential traits of true Christian humility.

Prudence also helps us to respect the individual calling of the Spirit and the various ways in which human beings can "live in Christ." Most saints desired self-abasement. Yet, we also find great and very generous saints who were apparently never drawn to imitate Christ in such a mode of extreme humility. Thus, not everyone will manifest the acquisition of humility in the same way. However, we need at least the desire to die to ourselves and to become one with the risen Lord Jesus. We need to be open to practicing that dying process unto transformation into Christ Jesus, in whatever way the Holy Spirit may prompt and lead us.

This transformation by growing in love and humility must be measured by our “magnificent obsession” to please God in all things as Jesus did, and to give pleasure to others by exalting God’s gifts in them. This means to humbly love and concretely serve each person we encounter.

As we contemplate the greatness of God, not only in ourselves and in our neighbors, but throughout all of creation, we wish greater effacement of what does not belong to God, namely our nothingness and our sins. In this we miraculously contemplate the glory of God in his creation. All of us human beings have only one, true common aim: to “Give Glory” [recognition of God’s Divinity and Majestic Radiance manifesting His Presence in all creation, visible and invisible] to God by seeking to please him in all things. His glory reigns throughout the cosmic universe. It is experienced by those who are gentle and humble of heart and have learned it from Jesus himself. Our constant, honest prayer, which will surely be answered by the Lord himself, should be: “Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto yours.”

A JOYFUL HUMILITY

Could we ever imagine that Jesus lived without a sense of humor? If we do not discover Jesus being playful and humble of heart while not taking himself too serious, it may mean that we have lost our sense of humor and wonder before the heavenly Father. Have we perhaps made Jesus’ humility according to our own image of what it means to be humble?

We have already shown that humility is the right relationship of ourselves with God, with our neighbor and with all of God’s creation. We also pointed out that prideful autonomy is the most irrational, most primal root of all sin. Pride manifests itself in many forms of independence of God and others, as the “false self” in us glorifies itself in a conscious or unconscious turning away from God. Jesus lived a life of joyful humility, as he realized in every moment that the Father was greater than he and that without the Father he could do nothing (John 5:30; 14:28). All his power to preach, heal and perform miracles came to him from his Father (John 5:20).

He discovered the Father working in every detail of his life, and he joyfully played and worked in the Father’s love and power (John 5:17).

There in the depths of his heart, his innermost consciousness, Jesus touched the holy. He breathed, smiled, laughed and cried in that holy presence of his infinitely loving Father. All outside created beings, touching Jesus in new, surprising experiences, were received by that delicate, sensitive gentleness in him as gifts. Absent were the moods of an angry, aggressive autonomy and uncontrolled self-indulgence.

LIVING UNDER STRESS

We Americans are not healthy people. One of the main causes is the stress under which most of us live. But an added fact is that we do not experience inner silence and healing of our bodily and psychological tensions by touching our indwelling, loving God as the foundation of our being.

Americans spend millions of dollars annually on laxatives alone. In a year we consume thousands of tons of aspirin. Tons of sleeping pills, tranquilizers, reducing pills and antacids are consumed, only to cover up symptoms and messages from a suffering, noisy body, flogged mercilessly by a disturbed psyche. Millions die of heart attack, while millions have some kind of heart condition. Millions have some kind of arthritis or rheumatism. Almost countless are those with stomach ulcers, diabetes or hypoglycemia, chronic disorders as asthma, anemia, multiple sclerosis, cancer, senility, mental and nervous diseases, alcoholism, drug dependence, respiratory difficulties and obesity.

Is there any way to offset the ravages of stress in our lives? We Christians believe in God's infinite love for each of his children, especially in the healing power of his Son, Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus went about healing the sick and the suffering, provided they believed in his healing love. Your faith in the Divine Physician can make you whole!

Accepting such love in times of stress and trials will open us up to the transcendent presence of the indwelling Trinity within us. We humbly confess to God, the source of our being and without whom we can do nothing. And we humbly accept our human limitations and failures, our unloving, false self, as we seek to surrender ourselves childlike to God. Such abandonment brings us joy and peace and removes all "seriousness" that comes from false pride---as though we alone need to solve all problems and conquer all crises.

HUMOR AND CHILDLIKE TRUST

When we entertain a right (Orthodoxia) relationship with God and neighbor, our mental "lightness" becomes habitual, radiating its joy to all our other emotions. It is rooted in God as the ultimate goal of all our striving. Even in suffering and infirmities we can rejoice as Saint Paul did: "I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ's power over me. I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Such faith and trust infused by the Holy Spirit come to us by way of an intuitive knowledge and not by sole human reasoning. These bring transcendent values into situations of seeming absurdity or exaggerated self-pride. Without such simple trust and humility we will lack any humor and right consonance with the mind of God. If we expand our sense of humor beyond childish jokes and levity, we will experience God's will in each moment and our lives in proper perspective. Jesus and his disciples show us a sense of humor with God at its center through child-like trust in him and a genuine humility. Such a sense of humor will enable us to discover joy, even in the midst of pain and suffering.

THE GIFT OF WONDER

Both joyous humility and a sense of wonder are signs of children who enjoy an authentically balanced human existence that will bring a matured spirituality in adulthood. We increase our sense of wonder by believing in the mystery of God's humble but mighty love in each detail of our lives. We learn to surrender to his loving activities for us, as we open up to his uncreated energies of love.

Wonder helps us to enter into the mystery of love of God and neighbor, and it always gives us a sense of surprise. We cannot by ourselves create wonder or surprise. But we can experience it in prayer. We enter into God's sacredness, as we move into awe and reverence before God's beauty and power, adoring in silent openness the divine maker of all beauty. God is beauty itself.

When we enter into the surprise of divine or human love we often feel uneasy since we are not in control of the situation. A new dimension of meaning is being revealed to us that challenges our habitual, rational understanding of being in control. In this uneasiness we ask new questions. New life is bursting all over the skies of our consciousness and unconscious, and we come alive with a new excitement in the presence of God as the source of all love. When we love one another, God's love is being perfected in us (1 John 4:12).

JOYFUL HUMILITY AND FUNCTUALISM

From God's view point the world is *one*. All created beings were meant to be inter-related in a harmonious wholeness, through the creative inventiveness and synergism of us human beings made in God's image and working with his. Each part has its proper place within the whole universe. Each being depends on and gives support to all the others in one great body, all of which has been created in and through God's Word (Psalm 104).

Unfortunately, we have lost this memory of a life of harmony. But when we open ourselves in childlike simplicity to the workings of the Holy Spirit, we recover the joyful humility that was given to the first man and woman before sin took it away and replaced it with pride.

Our joyful humility is the gift of the Holy Spirit that allows us to walk again with new eyes of wonder and reverence before the transcendent God. This gives us the balance between seriousness as God's stewards and priests of creation, and joyful humility. Obsessive seriousness as we try to succeed according to our self-centered understanding of success distorts our true values. As a result we measure our importance by our achievements, by our status before the world, by our power and possessions.

We can avoid the excessive lust of money, power and sense pleasures by balancing a true God-centered seriousness and a true caring for the concerns of our universe, with a cheerful humor. Then we can conquer any despair by trusting God's goodness and mercy. "For God is gracious and He loves mankind" (Conclusion of priest's prayer during Divine Liturgy).

FINDING GOD IN THE EVENT OF EACH MOMENT

This joyous humility allows us to seek the face of God in the event of every moment. God is, as it were, again taking on "flesh," by breaking into our world to pitch his tent among us, to bring his *shekinah* of infinite glory into our darkened world. The historical time of this *now* moment (the *chronos*) is transformed by the eternal *now* of God's healing love (the *kairos*). God's grace in his uncreated energies of love touch our free will, and the body-being of his only begotten Son, Jesus, is extended again into space and time.

Not only will we find God in each moment, but we will also seek to respond to his loving presence in each moment. The Eucharist is God's gift of Himself to us in his Son Jesus through his Spirit. Our daily lives are the "place" where we return our eucharistic gift of ourselves to God and neighbor. This place, this *now* event, is holy, for God's holy presence as perfect and eternal love to us is unveiled and experienced there. It is holy because (God is Holy); we respond by the power of the Holy Spirit to become God's holy children. This state of being, this state of contemplation, is nothing less than *joyful humility*.

HUMILITY IN SUFFERING AND DYING

We receive the greatest training in acquiring humility by accepting suffering throughout our lives. But we will have the most certain proof of our humility when we accept our earthly death not in a spirit of egotistic pride but in Christ-like humility. As Christians we are not to seek answers from Jesus to the perennial problem of suffering and death; he did not come into our material world to merely give us answers to our myopic questions.

Jesus Christ Our Lord suffered, as you and I do, not to be an answer to our problem with evil, but to become our *way*. Thus we move from suffering with Christ to sharing even now in his glory.

In his poem, "An Ode to the Setting Sun," written near the end of his life, Francis Thompson summarizes the paradox that one form of seeming death prepares for a new level of life:

For there is nothing lives but something dies,
And there is nothing dies but something lives,
Till skies be fugitives,
Till Time, the hidden root of change, updries,
Are Birth and Death inseparable on earth;
For they are twain yet one, and Death is Birth.

SUFFERING UNTO NEW LIFE

Jesus describes the process of dying that is at the heart of accepting all suffering with faith, trust and love: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34-35; cf. Matthew 10:38-39; Luke 9:23-24; 14:27).

He insists that the grain of wheat had to fall into the ground and die, or else it remained only a grain. Only in dying would it release the great potential of bringing forth new life. Only by living out our Baptism can we enter into the New Jerusalem. Only by a passover from slavery into the trials of our heart's desert will we share even now in God's life.

Suffering, trials and tribulations and our final earthly death are occasions to move beyond our proud, self-centered view of events and to open up to a faith-vision that the Holy Spirit can only infuse into the meek and humble of heart.

DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?

Let us look at our final physical death, which ends our earthly journey, in the light of other forms of death-dealing situations. What we fear in these is to give up our pride that has penetrated into most experiences of our past life. There is self-centeredness in all our thinking, speaking and acting. We do not wish to even think about our final death.

The reason why we fear death is that as babies and even adults we fear to accept our human limitations. We fear that death would bring us to be separated from our loved ones. The reality of our death is a terrifying upheaval in our way of thinking, acting and living in general. It is a fearful sundering of the only existence we have known up to that moment. It is the most "unnatural" act that we have to undergo in this life.

Thus we learn not to think of death, and we deny that it will ever happen to us. We delude ourselves, thinking that we can suppress our fears and anxieties. Our western culture helps us in this death-denying process, just as it helps us to continue living in pride and self-arrogance. We believe that we are self-sufficient and therefore we do not develop authentic humility that accepts our limited creatureliness.

The British historian Arnold Toynbee writes: "Death is un-American"; for, if the fact of death were once admitted to be a reality even in the United States, then it would also have to be admitted that the United States is not the earthly paradise that it is deemed to be. Present-day Americans, and other present-day Westerners too in their degree, tend to say, instead of "die," "pass on" or "pass away."

DEATH IS EVERYWHERE

None of us can escape the ever-present reality of death in its various forms. We experience the constant process of dissolution in youthful growing pains as well as in middle age and in retirement. As we grow older, our parents, relatives and friends begin to die. Violence and death, so vividly portrayed in the news, mass media, movies and video-games, are a constant reminder that we too will die. But since dying is portrayed as dehumanizing and impersonal, we block it out of our consciousness. The realization of our personal death is easily dimmed in the light of so many impersonalized deaths around us.

I believe that only the “humble of heart” will ponder their finiteness in a healthy way that calls them to new life. The proud do not wish to be reminded that they are not really the center of the universe. The Apostolic Fathers and the Early Christian Dwellers of the Desert reminded their spiritual children to “Watch what you eat, watch what you say, and think about your death every day.” This is not to be done in a morbid fashion. It is just a reminder for one to be vigilant about reality, the really real.

LEARNING TO BE HUMBLE

Having examined in the preceding months of our Inscape Newsletters, do you think we can come up with an ideal way of teaching humility? If we could, do you think people would be as enthusiastic to learn about it as they learn how to make more money from the latest “do-it-yourself” seminars? We cannot learn about humility until we really *want* to. Usually we desire to know about something only when we have realized that we do not know about it. In the same way, we begin to desire humility only when we discover our limitations and turn to God as the source of all our powers and goodness.

In this honest confrontation with our limitations and sins we realize the prideful illusions of our pseudo-power. We therefore desire to “die” to this illusory world by an inner revolution. Saint Paul teaches us how to be transformed from death to new life in Christ Jesus: “Get rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to---the old self which was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. Your hearts and minds must be made completely new. You must put on the new self, which is created in God’s likeness, and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

OUR MODEL BEFORE DEATH

In the death of Jesus we find the model for all Christians who are faced, not only with their final death, but also with other death-dealing situations in their earthly journey. Jesus reaches his full human potential as he freely surrenders his life to the Father on our behalf, for the “Life of the World.”

He suffers the same biological pains as any other human being undergoing crucifixion. But he *actively* brings together a lifetime of free, loving surrender of his entire being to his Father. Nowhere as on the cross does Jesus enter into the fullness of his humanity in his free gift of self to the Father. And nowhere during his lifetime does he so enter into the fullness of his divinity, revealed to us as love poured out.

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

The secret of an authentic Christian death situation lies in the power of the cross. It is a logic and wisdom that go beyond the rational control of human nature. "For the preaching of the cross to those who have gone astray is foolishness; but to us who are saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Saint Paul tells us of the power and the wisdom of God: "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25). Against the wisdom of the world Jesus insisted that if anyone wanted to be his disciple and obtain eternal life, he had to begin by a "dying process."

THREE STAGES OF TRANSFORMATION

There are three stages in transforming our suffering and death and humbly accepting them as stepping stones to greater union with Christ and through him with the blessed Trinity.

The first stage, in the words of the early Fathers of the desert, is "to push the mind down into the heart." It is to enter into the "inner closet" (Matthew 6:6) that Jesus spoke about when he instructed his disciples how they were to pray in his Holy Spirit.

This is a call to move away from our carnal-minded pride and to enter into the transcendental presence of the indwelling Trinity. It is in this place of the *heart* that we are to meet the risen Jesus. There he reveals through his Spirit's faith that this suffering and even death can truly work for our good as "And we know that those who love God are helped by him in everything for good" (Romans 8:28).

But how we dread entering into our innermost selves! We fear that we might have to trust in God alone and destroy in our mind the idols of a God who can never be called by name. Only in inward silence (stillpoint) can we hear God speak new meaning into suffering. Such inner solitude engenders humility when we learn to leave the flattering, pampering world of the senses and illusions. It comes about only if we have the courage to taste our inner poverty in and through humility.

The second stage comes from our being forced to ask ourselves "Who am I"? This question forces us in our brokenness, sinfulness and "zero-ness" to give meaning to such illogical things as suffering, trials and death itself, in order to confront who Jesus Christ really is for us.

Consequently, faith becomes a response to his invitation to suffer with him, in order to enter into union with him even now and to live in his glorified, resurrected life. It is to know by faith and experience what our personal sinfulness and frailty mean; what it means to have spurned, in the folly of our arrogant pride, the infinite love of God given to us through Jesus Christ, who has died out of humble love for us. It is to confront our inauthentic selves, covered by the hard shell of our self-containment or pride.

We weep and mourn for our blindness, which leads us to the third stage: to bring about humility. By consecrating our suffering through faith, we sublimate it and live it with child-like trust in the power of the risen Lord. Thus we enter into a deeper union with Christ as proof that God truly exalts the humble.

GIVE PRAISE TO THE LORD

The sign of our new relationship with the Trinity is our readiness to praise God in all circumstances. We Christians learn through the Holy Spirit's infusion of faith, hope and love, how to praise God in all seasons. In everything that happens to us God is loving us and showering upon us the gift of himself. Praise is what flows from the depths of our being, as we surrender lovingly to him.

Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God from their prison cell. We too can through humility raise our hands, even when suffering bows us down to earth, and pray, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Adversities allow us to humble ourselves before God so that he raises us up to a new union of love with him (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Here is the proof of our humility: When humility and love meet in us through Jesus Christ and give us freedom through the Holy Spirit to rejoice in our infirmities and weaknesses; when Christ is our strength and in him we can do all things (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Then we too can pray with Saint Paul in deepest humility and love.

"And we know that those who love God are helped by him in everything for good. He knew them in advance and he marked them with the likeness of the image of his Son that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, those whom he marked in advance, he has called, and those whom he has called, he has declared righteous, and those whom he has declared righteous, he has glorified. What then shall we say concerning these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? If he did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, why will he not freely give us all things with him? Who is to complain against the chosen ones of God? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died and rose again, and he is at the right hand of God making intercession for us. What shall separate me from the love of Christ? Tribulation or imprisonment or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written, for your sake we die every day, and we are accounted as lambs for the slaughter. But in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor empires nor armies nor things present nor things to come. Nor height nor depth nor anything else created shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 8:28-39).

I share with you a lengthy, but fitting conclusion to these past three months of Inscape on the topic of humility:

Humility even without efforts gains forgiveness for many trespasses; but without humility even efforts are vain and may lead to much harm. What salt is for any food, humility is for every virtue. To acquire it, a man must always think of himself with contrition, self-belittlement and painful self-judgment. But if we acquire it, it will make us sons of God. (St. Isaac the Syrian)

Someone was asked: "How can a man acquire humility?" he said: "By constant remembrance of one's trespasses and of the nearness of death, by poor clothes, by always preferring the last place and by gladly undertaking the lowest and most degrading tasks on every occasion: by not being disobedient, by keeping silence, by not liking to go to meetings, by wishing to remain unknown, and not elected for any post, by never keeping a single thing entirely at his own disposal, by hating conversations with a number of people, and by not liking any gains, and above all by being in his mind above blaming and accusing any man, and above envy---by not being a man who lays his hand on others but who suffers the hands of others being laid on him, and does his own work in solitude and carries no cares in the world except himself. To be more brief: the life of a stranger in this world, poverty and solitude---these are the things which *give birth* to humility and purity of the heart. (Saint Isaac the Syrian)

A humble man does not dare even to pray or petition God about something, and does not know what to ask for; he simply keeps all his senses silent and waits only for mercy and for whatever the Most Worshipful Majesty may be pleased to send him. When he bows down with his face to the earth, and the inner eyes of his heart are raised to the gates of the Holy of Holies, where He dwells Whose abode is darkness, before Whom the Seraphims close their eyes, he dares only to speak and pray thus: "May Thy will be done upon me, O Lord!" (Saint Isaac the Syrian)

Humility is a certain mysterious force, which perfected saints receive when they have completed their life. This force is given by the power of grace only to those who are perfect in virtue, for this virtue includes all in itself. (Saint Isaac the Syrian)

If anyone should ask how to acquire humility, we would answer: "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord" (Matthew 10:25). See how much humility was shown by Him Who has given us this commandment and Who gives us this gift; imitate Him and you will acquire it. (Saint Isaac the Syrian)

Humility is followed by self-mastery and restraint in everything. Through constant self-restraint, humility comes to contemplation and adorns the soul with chastity; whereas vanity, through constant turmoil and confusion of thoughts, gathers impure treasures from everything it meets, and defiles the heart. It looks with unseemly eyes at the nature of things, and fills the mind with shameful images; but humility brings spiritual harmony through contemplation and urges its possessor to glorify God. (Saint Isaac the Syrian)

Let all who are led by the Spirit of God enter with us into this spiritual and wise gathering, holding in their spiritual hands the God-inspired tablets of knowledge. We have met, we have investigated, and we have probed the meaning of this precious inscription. And one said: "It means constant oblivion of one's achievements." Another: "It is the acknowledgement of oneself as the last of all and the greatest sinner of all." And another: "The mind's recognition of one's weakness and impotence." Another again: "In fits of rage it means to forestall one's neighbor and be first to stop the quarrel." And again another: "Recognition of divine grace and divine mercy." And again another: "The feeling of a contrite soul, and the renunciation of one's own will." But when I had listened to all this and had attentively and soberly considered it, I found that I had not been able to comprehend the blessed sense of that virtue from what had been said. Therefore, last of all, having gathered what fell from the lips of those learned and blessed fathers as a dog gathers the crumbs that fall from the table, I too gave my definition of it and said: "Humility is the nameless grace in the soul, its name known only to those who have learned it by experience. It is unspeakable wealth, a name and gift from God, for it is said: Learn not from an angel, not from man, and not from a book, but from Me, that is, from Me indwelling, from My illumination and action in you, for I am meek and humble in heart and in thought and in spirit, and your souls shall find rest from conflicts and relief from arguments." (Saint John Climacus)

He who has taken humility as his bride is above all gentle, kind, full of compunction, sympathetic, calm, bright, compliant, inoffensive, wide awake, not indolent and (why say more?) free from passion; for the Lord remembered us in our humility, and delivered us from our enemies (Psalm 135:23-24), and our passions and impurities. (Saint John Climacus)

Know, beloved, that the valleys shall stand deep in corn and spiritual fruit. This valley is a soul low and humble among the mountains, that is, it is filled with labors and virtues, and always remains lowly and steadfast. David did not say, "I have fasted," "I have kept vigil," or "I have lain on the bare earth," but "I humbled myself, and soon the Lord saved me" (Psalms 115:5). (Saint John Climacus)

All visible things get their light from the sun, and all that is done according to reason gets its force from humility. Where there is no light, everything is dark; where there is no humility, all that we have is rotten. (Saint John Climacus)

It is one thing to be humble, another to strive for humility, and another to praise the humble. The first belongs to the perfect, the second to the truly obedient, and the third to all the faithful. (Saint John Climacus)

Humility is the door of the Kingdom that introduces those who draw near to it. And I think that the Lord was speaking of this door when He said: He shall enter and shall pass out of life without fear, and shall find pasture and green grass in paradise. All who have entered the monastic life by any other door are thieves and robbers of their own life. (Saint John Climacus)

If we sincerely wish to guard our mind in the Lord, we have need of great humility, first in relation to God and, second, in relation to men. We should always strive to make our heart contrite, seeking for and putting into practice every means for humbling it. It is well known that what renders the heart humble and contrite is memory of our former life in the world, if it is recollected by us as it should be. Another thing is memory of all our sins from youth onward; if the mind examines them in detail, this recollection habitually makes us humble, brings tears and moves us to a whole-hearted gratitude to God; so too does a constant and active (deeply felt) memory of death which gives birth to sweetness, glad mourning and sobriety of mind.

The thing which pre-eminently humbles our mind and disposes us to keep our eyes downcast to the ground is memory of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, if a man goes over it in his memory and remembers it in detail. This also engenders tears. In addition our soul is made truly humble by the great mercies of God toward us personally, if we examine and enumerate them in detail; for our fight is with proud demons (who are ungrateful to God).

(Philotheus of Sinai)

{Quotes from the *Pilgrimage of the Heart, A Treasury of Eastern Christian Spirituality* by Fr. George Maloney}

May God grant to you his gifts of joyful humility and humble service in renouncing everything in order to find him.

Fr. John Michael Zboyovski