



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States
Monthly Message for the Priests Wives
January 2021

Traits of Humility

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

A friend of mine recently gave a talk about humility that really opened my eyes to new ways to approach it. I share it with you, dear sister, hoping that, by sharing, it sinks in more and I learn the lesson better.

It's been said that humility is the mother of all other virtues, but it sure doesn't come easily. Humility for me is a lifelong lesson and one I struggle with often.

It's a tricky one: as soon as you feel you've figured it out, you trip over your pride again.

I was thinking about the parable of the foolish man and the wise man. One builds his house on sand, and the other builds his house on the rock. Christ tells us that the one who builds his house on the rock is the one who hears and obeys His commandments.

Let's then picture the foolish man as the one who builds his house on himself—on his talent, abilities—on his pride and vanity. And the wise man is the one who builds his house on humility. What a difference between the two! What a catastrophic landslide for the former when the rains come!

With this picture in mind—our houses built on a firm foundation of humility—here are four traits of humility.

Everything Comes from God

The first and most essential trait is remembering always that everything comes from God. Let's remind ourselves that all that we have comes from the Pantocrator. It's God who blesses us, who gives any kind of authority, success or prosperity, and who gives the increase in our service.

In everything we do, whether in service or at work, blessings in our family or in our community, we must remember that God is the one causes efforts to prosper in His own time and in His own way.

Saint Paul faced this issue when he wrote to the Corinthians saying, *"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?"* He reminded the people that all their servants worked in part, but it was God who moved hearts: *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase"* (1 Corinthians 3:5-6).

We are nothing of ourselves and in remembering God first and at the heart of all of our success keeps us humble. *"So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase"* (1 Corinthians 3:7).

We are so grateful that we serve the Pantocrator, the Lord Almighty. Giving thanks to Him in all things teaches our heart to be humble about what we have and achieve. If we're given a position or any kind of authority, we remind ourselves that it is God who gives authority: *"There is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God"* (Romans 13:1). Our boss—at whose whim and delight we work and serve and live—is the Lord Himself.

Forgetting that God is the source of all goodness in our lives can easily lead to the destruction of houses built on the sand of pride.

Our Confidence Is in Christ

In order to have the courage to take good actions, we must have some measure of confidence. We are blessed as children of God that our confidence is not in ourselves. Instead, our confidence is in our Savior.

We act, not believing in ourselves, but believing in the One who saves and supports us. We do our due diligence, we complete the tasks set before us wholeheartedly, and then we trust Him to come through in His own, best way.

Saint Paul says, *"Of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities"* (2 Corinthians 12:5) and again *"God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Galatians 6:14).

Our calling is to *"all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love"* (Ephesians 4:2). With that in mind, we work faithfully and humbly, trusting Jesus Christ to make use of that work for His greater purposes.

Imagine if our confidence comes only from ourselves. How many times a day we fail ourselves! But a house built on trusting God cannot be shaken. God is immovable and unchanging.

The Tongue Must Be Tamed

Oh, this is a hard one, especially for someone like me who is accustomed to the witty and sarcastic retort. But there is no humility if the tongue is not tamed. We must be able to silence ourselves in order to really listen to others.

Did you know that silent and listen are anagrams—made up of the same letters? They are two sides of the same coin.

Saint James describes the tongue as the rudder for the whole ship of our being. The one who has control of her tongue can control her whole body, and the one who can't control her tongue can start a whole forest fire (James 3:2-6).

It's a blessing to us that Saint James doesn't pretend this is an easy task. He points out that though mankind has tamed every creature, still we all struggle to control our tongues. *"But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison"* (James 3:8). Yet, that is exactly our task if we wish to live a life of humility.

We know well how, despite being viciously attacked, Pope Kyrillos VI kept from striking back with his own words. How much self-control and trust in God—and humility above all—this must have taken!

With a poorly chosen word, phrase, or conversation, a house can collapse. Words when said are so difficult to take back. Carefully weighed words—and, even better, carefully chosen silence—are the mark of someone striving for humility.

The Humble Are Wise Peacemakers

Christ says in the Sermon on the Mount, *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"* (Matthew 5:9).

The humble are peacemakers. They don't stir up useless troubles for others or fan flames of hate or discord. Because they are able to keep their egos and vanities in check, they can bring many perspectives to one table and can create compromise and harmony where it wasn't before.

"A soft answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1) and the humble can find those gentle words that restore peace in difficult and tense situations.

The kind of wisdom required to be a peacemaker can only come from God—and asking can only come with humility.

Saint James tells us, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him"* (James 1:5)

Acting in wisdom and as peacemakers, we can draw closer to the kind of humility that lifts us to the face of God.

Let's be like the wise man who builds his house on the rock. If we build our house on humility—remembering God as the source of everything, putting our confidence in Christ, taming our tongues, and seeking to act as wise peacemakers—we can feel assured of the firmness of foundation we've laid. A foundation that relies entirely on God and works towards self-control and discipline in ourselves.

Your sister in Christ,

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