



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Monastic

August 2023

On Vainglory

Once a servant came up to Father Pishoy and said to him, "I sometimes receive glory from people and I enjoy this glorification". Father Pishoy asked him saying, "Will you be attending evening vespers this evening?" To which he responded, "Yes". Father Pishoy said, "Good" and then left him without saying anything further. In the general sermon of the evening vespers Father Pishoy opened fire on this servant, (without mentioning him by name, or even looking at him) saying, "Who are you O servant who steals the glory of the Lord? Why do you pray to be a servant? Is it for your personal glory or the glory of God? Do you not remember what happened to King Herod who stole the glory of God?..." and Father Pishoy continued in this manner, "You are a robber and a thief..." and so on. The servant describes how the words of Father Pishoy rained down on him like fire, purifying him of all desires for personal glory so that towards the end he could no longer bear it and left the meeting weeping. The following day he was surprised by a telephone call from Father Pishoy who said to him, "How are you? How are you doing?" So the servant responded, "The sermon was very tough my Father and I could not bear it, it was so severe." So Father Pishoy answered, "Sometimes to get rid of the infection you need to cause a wound so that the infection can come out, and for this you will feel pain of course. However I am praying for you, be strong, and I am with you and anytime you need me contact me." The servant says that after this hot strike treatment and the wisdom of Father Pishoy he never felt the need to rob God of His glory again. This servant became one of the greatest servants in the church with many responsibilities serving God with all humility and remembering always to give glory to God.

The passion of vanity, or vain glory, which means empty glory. It gives you an irresistible urge to show off and look glorious. Maybe you think showing off couldn't really hurt anyone and isn't much of a sin. But do you remember hearing about when the devil tempted our Lord Jesus in the wilderness? one of these was the urge to show off. Leading Jesus up to the

"pinnacle of the temple," the devil said, "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down there; for it is written that God will put his angels in charge of you, so you will never be hurt by being dashed against the stones" (Matt. 4:6). Then Jesus answered, "It is also written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt.4:7). You see? He refused to show off. Vanity tries to push you into doing something spectacular like that, something foolish with no point to it-and especially with no love in it! It urges you to do things that put you in a wonderful light and make people admire you. But it leaves you empty, because in the end human admiration doesn't do anything for you psychologically or spiritually.

There are two degrees of vanity,

+ The first kind of vainglory" is that by which we are uplifted because of external things." This is the crudest form of vainglory that affects fallen man in the most immediate, most frequent and simplest way, consisting in his appearing proud, glorying in the goods which he possesses or believes to possess and desiring to be seen, considered, admired, esteemed, honored, praised, and flattered by other men.

+ The second kind of vainglory distinguished by St. John Cassian "is that by which we are inflamed with the desire for empty praise because of spiritual and hidden things." In the spiritual man still subject to the passions, this coexists with the first kind, or takes its place when he has moved beyond all attachment to earthly goods; it consists for him in glorying in himself or taking pride before other men in his virtues or asceticism, and in seeking to have them admired and praised by others.

Vanity is pretending or imagining things that aren't true about yourself and won't do you any permanent good, but only make you look wonderful for a little while. It's like living your life in a dream. It is as when a hungry man dreams, and behold, he eats; but he awakes and is empty. Or as when a thirsty man dreams, and behold, he drinks; but when he awakes, he is faint and thirsty.- Is. 29:8 Vanity makes you want to keep God out of the picture, so you can feel glorious and important by imagining you really have taken His place. It makes you want to keep your brain blindfolded, so you can dream and not be disturbed by the reality of God's light. The Bible is talking about vanity when it says, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light" (Jn. 3:19). You see? They actually desired the darkness. Pride only makes us think we ought to be important and be able to accomplish great things. But vanity fills us with a desire to look important, whether we are or not, and to look as though we are accomplishing great things.

With pride, we are merely ignorant of what our real self is like. But with vanity, we deliberately build a fake image of what we are like. We set up this image of ourselves so we can gaze fondly at it, and when we set up an image for ourselves and others to admire, it's the death of us too. Our real self becomes buried in a little tomb way down in our heart; and as long as vanity is in control, no one ever hears much from it again. Vanity hates your real self and wants to keep it buried, because your real self is weak and awkward and would humiliate it. Your real self would never get all the praises and compliments that vanity can get by setting up its fake image of you. Vanity can make you look sweet, sincere, faithful, noble, and even humble, whereas your real self wouldn't begin to look that good if it were showing. Vanity always hates God too, because God is waiting for the least opportunity to go down into your heart and revive your real self and give it the strength to live.

Vanity wants to make you look attractive, fascinating, bright, gifted, faithful, in control of everything, and in possession of all the characteristics your society most applauds, so you will have a kind of glory of your own.

vanity makes you crave the attention and admiration of people around you. That's why the fathers say that vanity is man-pleasing instead of God-pleasing. Vain people don't care about anything except winning the admiration of others.

For instance, something that always comes along with vanity is a terrific amount of anger, but vain people cover it up. They very often cover it up with illness and Physical disabilities. They can cover it up by being quiet or by walking out on you. Or they can let it out and then cover it up afterwards, by making it look like righteous anger for some just cause. In any event, they never let it look like a weakness or sin. They keep it out of sight, or they make it look like a brave protest so you'll admire it, always trying to give you impressions that aren't true. Because they are fighting to look so good, they are hypersensitive to the least criticism, always afraid their shortcomings will be found out. The more dishonest they are, the more sensitive they are. Sometimes they'll take the most objective remarks very personally. Half of what you say may offend them, because they'll interpret it as personal criticism. Anyone who is too easily hurt or too quickly offended shows that he has a dangerously high amount of vanity in himself and wants a very abnormal amount of praise from other people. It is impossible for one who is captivated by love of applause to think of or do anything great or noble.

When you fall into the disease of man-pleasing (which we all do to one degree or another), you become a slave. You do whatever people say, and you lose the power to stand up for yourself. If someone says dress a certain way, you

dress that way. If he says have certain likes and dis-likes, you make it your business to have them. If he says go with certain people, you go with those people. If he says shut out certain people, that's what you do. If he says don't embarrass me by being too religious, you'll even pull yourself away from God for him. And if he says you should be ashamed of yourself, you're immediately ashamed of your-self. Vanity is what produces the person who can't say no to people but can easily say no to God. If the disease goes too far, your one and only aim in life is to please all other people so they will approve of you and flatter you.

In describing vainglory, we see that it is a particularly subtle passion, difficult to recognize, able to take on multiple forms and to attack man from many angles, such that St. John Climacus considers it as "the most difficult and most dangerous of all snares.

Since vainglory is the quest for glory of a human, mundane, and earthly character, the man wishing to conquer this passion must recognize the vanity of such glory by becoming aware that its foundation lacks substance and the goals it pursues are naught, as the Fathers repeatedly underscore.' Death reveals the full extent of the vanity and emptiness of the human things vainglory has in sight, while at the same time it is the crucial moment in which divine judgment is disclosed to man. This is why the "remembrance of death" is also an effective weapon against this passion.? Since vainglory is also the quest for respect, renown, honor, and glory, it is fitting to renounce everything than can be a source or occasion for it. One must flee the company of those who are obviously under its sway' and give a deadly example. One must refuse every function honored by men especially on account of the power or prestige it confers; one must push away every distinction capable of attracting admiration or praise. As vainglory is the desire to be noticed, it is even fitting to avoid what can call attention to us, whether in word or deed or behavior. On the contrary, whoever wants to be delivered from vainglory must do everything to become or remain unknown by men. Opting for a life in insignificance, as well as seeking out solitude.

John Climacus advises: "Be zealous within your soul, without showing it in the least outwardly, either by visible sign or by word or by a hint", "hide your manner of life wherever you go." Elsewhere he writes: "The beginning of freedom from vainglory is the control of the mouth." This implies even more so the refusal to teach others, and even to speak a word, as St. Macarius the Great stresses: "Whoever is asked to speak and whom one constrains to give a word must be grieved at this; he must flee the thing as he would fire and repel the thought of it in order to escape and not fall into vainglory on account

of his word." The saint also cites the example of Moses, who, being asked by God Himself to proclaim the word to Israel, excused himself, saying: "I am not eloquent"; the example of Jeremiah, who likewise excused himself by saying: "Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth", and that of St. Paul, who writes of his ministry: "Necessity is laid upon me." In the sayings of the fathers, numerous examples are found of Fathers who thus refuse to speak,

To overcome vainglory, we must cultivate the virtue of humility in our lives. Humility, is not weakness or self-degradation. It is a strength of character and a recognition that all good things come from God. Humility teaches us to acknowledge our limitations, weaknesses, and our utter dependence on the grace of God. It enables us to live with authenticity, grounded in the truth of our identity as beloved children of God. Moreover, we must shift our focus from self to others. The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 2:3-4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others." When we redirect our attention to the needs of those around us, we break free from the chains of vainglory. Acts of selfless love, kindness, and service become our primary goal, rather than seeking personal recognition or gain. Prayer and self-examination are essential tools in our battle against vainglory. Through prayer, we surrender our ego and desires to God, inviting Him to transform our hearts. We ask for His guidance and strength to overcome the allure of self-glorification. Self-examination helps us identify the areas in our lives where vainglory lurks, enabling us to repent and seek God's forgiveness. let us remember that our true worth and significance lie not in the fleeting applause of the world but in our identity as children of God. As we seek to emulate Christ, let us imitate His humility and selfless love. By living in humble service to others, we become vessels of God's grace, reflecting His love to the world. May we strive daily to embrace humility, rejecting the siren call of vainglory. Let us find joy in serving others, seeking the glory of God rather than our own.

The sign that a man has been healed of vainglory is that he no longer experiences sorrow at being humiliated in public, nor does he any longer feel rancor towards whoever has offended, despised, or insulted him, or towards the person who has spoken (or continues to speak) ill of him. On the contrary, he thanks him as being a benefactor, "When men begin to praise us, let us briefly call to mind the multitude of our sins, and we shall find ourselves unworthy of what is said or done in our honor. "Finally, let us note the essential role prayer plays in the healing of vainglory, as with every passion. Through prayer, man receives from God the help without which he remains

powerless to conquer any passion whatsoever. But in the case of vainglory, he receives in addition the discernment necessary for foiling all the snares laid for him by the passion. Prayer likewise allows him to be detached from this world, which vainglory has as its object, and to attach himself to God. Finally, prayer allows him to glorify God by recognizing that "to Him is due all glory, honor, and worship.