

## On the Healing of Pride

a good Lord. What a work of grace humility is!

Pride is a spiritual sin, less shameful and less debasing than the sins of the flesh, but more serious, since it turns us more away from God. Lucifer did not commit the sins of the flesh—being a pure spirit—but he was irredeemably lost through pride. In the opinion of St. Thomas Aquinas, pride is more than a capital sin; it is the source of all the capital sins.

He defined pride as the inordinate love of our own excellence. Thus, the proud man wishes to appear superior to what he really is. This sin might take the form of an inordinate love of our physical strength or size, or it might be about our intelligence or spiritual goods. It expresses itself when the intellect considers our own merits and the failures of our neighbor, in order to raise ourselves over our neighbor in some way.

It is like a bandage over the eyes of the spirit, so that we cannot see the majesty of God and the excellence of those who surpass us. It will prevent us from wishing to be instructed by our neighbor, or accepting correction only with much argument. It hinders us from asking light from God, who consequently hides His truth from the proud. Therefore our Lord says, “I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones.” (Lk 10.21)

St. Bernard enumerates several manifestations of pride: curiosity, levity of mind, foolish and misplaced joy, boasting, singularity, arrogance, presumption, the refusal to recognize one’s errors, the dissimulation of one’s sins in the confessional, rebellion, unbridled liberty, the habit of sin even to the contempt of God.

The great remedy for pride is to recognize the majesty of God. “Who is like God?”—St. Michael asks. As St. Paul put it, “For who distinguisheth thee? Or what has thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” (I Cor 4.7) We need to tell ourselves that we have been created out of nothing. And if there is any grace in us, it is because Jesus redeemed us with His blood.

We also need to tell ourselves that there is something in us which is worse than nothingness: the disorder of sin and its effects. As sinners, we *deserve* scorn and all humiliations. The *Imitation of Christ* puts it well as an example of how we can talk to ourselves: “If thou shouldst see another openly do wrong or commit some grievous sins, thou needest not think thyself better; for thou knowest not how long thou mayest be able to persevere in well-doing. We are all frail; but see thou think none more frail than thyself...Be not ashamed to wait on others for the love of Jesus Christ, and to be looked upon as poor in this world...”

But to reach humility of mind and heart, God must purify us. What we impose upon ourselves and what we say to ourselves is not enough. So God in His mercy will send us trials, so that the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost will take off the bandage of pride from our eyes, so that we may see the depth of frailty and even wretchedness that exists in us, and the great utility of adversity and humiliation, that finally makes us say to the Lord, “It is good for me that Thou has humbled me, that I may learn thy justifications.” (Ecclus. 34.9)

So two things must be done: 1. Telling ourselves the truth. 2. Accepting the corrections of