

1. HUMILITY

1.1 Definition

- ❖ Humility is not a mere form of external appearance by the utterance of humble expressions or adopting a certain frontal behaviour .It is rather the narrow gate through which the seekers of the Kingdom pass, it is the cross carried by those who desire to follow the Lord , “.....*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*” (Matt. 16:24) . .

- ❖ Humility is not a separate virtue on its own, it is the foundation for all other virtues. It is the leaven that leavens all the dough, without it all virtues are hollow- without grace or fruit. Humility is the soul’s genuine behaviour before God in the prayer chamber. It results in a true Christian behaviour as set by the Bible ,as :
 - ❖ giving others priority when it comes to interests “ *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*” (Phil. 2:4)
 - ❖ being not judgmental “*Judge not, that you be not judged....*”(Matt. 7:1-5)
 - ❖ taking the rear seat “ *So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them.....But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place,.....*” (Luke 14:7-11)
 - ❖ giving preference to others “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.*” (Phil. 2:4)
 - ❖ evasion of false glory , as Saint Paul when he healed the crippled man in Lystra (Acts 14:8-15)
 - ❖ bearing insults and sufferings joyfully, as Saint Peter says “ *... but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.....*” (1 Pet. 4:12-19)

- ❖ Our forefathers , who lived and practised the life of humility, have recorded their experiences and left for us an enormous amount of sayings:
 - ❖ ‘Humility is a grace within the soul. Only those who have it, know it. You do not learn humility from angels, people or books, you learn humility of the heart from the Lord Himself ’ [. Saint John]

- ❖ An elder said, ‘It is a great divine work, its path is paved for the body. Once you regard yourself a sinner and below all people, you will not see others’ sins but your own , and you will always pray to the Lord for mercy.’
- ❖ Another saying ‘ Humility is the tree of life. Those who eat of it will not die. Humility is the soil that bears the virtues, without it even perfection is meaningless’.

Humility is a way of living led by the Christian and is based on :

1.1.1 Knowledge of oneself and one’s capabilities

Any good actions are done through God “.....for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5). These good works were previously planned for us to follow “ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

1.1.2 Knowledge of the basis of evil and sin in the world - i.e. pride

Our first parents possessed God’s Knowledge of good, but they preferred their own knowledge , and as a result they fell “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:5). Death found its way to the whole human race “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned;” (Rom. 5:12). Thus, a person’s ego became one’s deity and very difficult to reform “For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters,.....” (2 Tim. 3:2-4), Therefore the Apostle says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.".....” (Jam. 4:6).

1.1.3 Knowledge of Christ the Saviour

Through humility and submission, Christ defeated the original sin ,(pride) as St. Paul says “ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. 2: 6-8). Whenever any Christian gazes at the Master , follows His example , and listens to Him saying “.....learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,” (Matt. 11:29) ,he will inevitably feel ashamed of himself and follow the path of humility for the love of Christ and not to win favour from people.

1.2 Jesus Christ is the source of true humility

The life of Christ on earth is the source of inspiration to all those who walk the path of humility. Each time a person takes a forward step he has to make a comparison with the Lord’s life, one then finds that there is no margin of comparison between the Lord’s humility and human humility. The Lord’s invitation to learn from Him “..... learn from Me....”(Matt. 11:29) becomes more effective as an indication of our own attitude, behaviour and steps against what Christ has done for us

- ❖ The Lord who “.....are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel ...” (Ps. 22:3) and “...the heavens are not pure in His sight,” (Job 15:15), descends from the Heavens and is born like us, takes our flesh “ *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same,.....* ” (Heb. 2:14). He chooses the most humble of places to be born in “*..in a manger,...*” (Luke 2:7), born to a poor family whose offering for His circumcision was the offering set for the poor “ *....two turtledoves or two young pigeons,.....* ” (Lev. 14:22), flees the tyranny “ *..... flee to Egypt,...* ” (Matt. 2:13) and lives in the tiny town of Nazareth with His parents

Does this not deflate our inflated egos?

- ❖ The sinless Lord “ *.... a High Priest, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;....* ” (Heb. 7:26) bowed His head in preparation for John the Baptist to baptise Him saying “ *...Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.* ” (Matt. 3:15). He concealed His divinity allowing Satan to tempt Him “ *And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan,....* ” (Mark 1:13), He “ *...has nowhere to lay His head....* ” (Matt. 8:20). He received the insults and false accusations of the Jews and “ *.... made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.....* ” (Phil. 2:7) .

Does this not motivate us to follow His steps?

- ❖ The Lord , before whom “ *.....the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down* ” (Rev. 5:6-14) ,took the role of the servant and “ *.... rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself....., He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded....* ” (John 13:4 -5), telling them that by so doing He set them an example (John 13:15). He took upon Himself the sufferings of the trials, the crucifixion, and the humiliation, “ *And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.* ” (Phil. 2:8).

Would not this fill us with humility?

When Saint Augustine and Saint Irenaeus reflected upon the life of the Lord, they noted that He began the sermon on the Mount by talking about humility “ *Blessed are the poor in spirit.....* ” (Matt. 5:3).

1.3 On the path Of the Lord's humility

Throughout the generations, the Apostles and Saints followed the humble example set by the Lord and His way of self-denial: “ *A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.* ” (Matt. 10:24). They became like ignited signs for us and they will remain so until the end of times.

- ❖ St Paul considered himself “ *.....the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things* ” (1Cor. 4:13) , “ *.....sinners, of whom I am chief*” (1 Tim. 1:15). However, when he had to defend his apostate and spoke about his sufferings, he repeated that he “ *...become a fool in boasting;..* ” (2 Cor. 12:11).

- ❖ In confronting the demons St Anthony said, ‘What do you want of me, you are strong and I am weak?’. He fell on the ground crying to the Lord ‘ Lord, help me, strengthen my weakness. Do not abandon me, Lord you know I am weak to fight even the weakest of them ’. The demons fled from his prayers which were filled with humility.
- ❖ Although the Saints and Apostles reached a high degree of grace and were bountifully blessed by the Spirit, they were keen to attribute all miracles and all great works to the power of God . Saint Peter and Saint John when they healed the lame man and noticed that the people were amazed, they said to them “.....*Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus,*” (Acts 3:12-16).
- ❖ The saints are keen to hide their virtues , so the devil of boasting is unable to spoil their crowns .For example, St. Sarabamon Abo Tarha when he cast out the demon from the Governor’s daughter , he took with him the stick of the Pope , to claim that the miracle is attributed to the prayers and spiritual power of the Pope .

1.4 How to attain humility

- ❖ Humility is a gift from the Lord to the soul which is steadfast in applying the commandments , strict in the Christian behaviour , and carries it’s cross daily. Through the grace of the Lord , this soul converted to “.. *become blameless and harmless..*” (Phil.2:15), as the command of the Lord “....*be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*” (Matt. 10:16).
- ❖ The simple people by nature are easier to be humble than the obstinate and hard ones. Although any person accepts to struggle against the desires of flesh and soul , and trained in the narrow way of the Lord , must get the sweet fruit of humility “*Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*” (Heb. 12:11). Saint Paul also, “.....*always strive to have a conscience without offence toward God and men.*” (Acts 24:16). Saint John Daragy says , ‘In the beginning , we struggle to reject laud . But as humility grows up we consider whatever good works we completed as worthless . At this stage humility fills our minds, so we will not be distracted by visions or any other sort of attractions from our feeling of worthlessness. Humility for the perfect people is above definition , it is like a plant which continuously grows because it is always watered.’

These points help us to attain humility:

1.4.1 Continuous gazing to the humility of our Lord

Lord God is the centre of attraction to the soul in its journey to heaven . Saint Paul the apostle advises us for “... *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*” (Heb. 12:2) .The soul observes Him “.....*gentle and lowly in heart, ...*” (Matt. 11:29). So, it learns from Him , and measures its feelings and behaviour according to HIS example. The obedience of the Lord is the optimum picture to be followed “

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God... .., He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil.2:5-8)

1.4.2 The continuous obedience to the commandment

Our Lord advises us to know the commandments and apply them in our life; *“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me...” (John 14:21)* . This is why the Christian struggles through the grace of the Lord to observe the commandments against the earthly desires and the temptations of the Devil. The commandments of the Lord *“.....is exceedingly broad ” (Ps. 119:96)* , and regardless of our struggle and advancement , we have to consider ourselves with Saint Paul *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, to attain....” (Phil.3:12-14)*. The Lord teaches us to count ourselves as *“....unprofitable servants....” (Luke 17:10)*. This leads us to more self denial and humility. Reading and contemplating also in the life of the saints who applied the commandments with all their hearts , lead us to more humility.

1.4.3 The knowledge of our selves

- ❖ The discovery of our selves through the light of God , is a significant sign in the path of humility. Saint Isaac says: ‘ Blessed is the man who discover his weakness . This discovery is the foundation of every good thing . As when we discover our weakness, we will ask the help of the Lord and depend on Him to control our selves’
- ❖ The human being is *“.....a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” (Jam. 4:14)* , and is only *“....dust will return to the earth as it was,..” (Ecc. 12:7)* . All humans beauty, power, might, intellect and all the inventions will not slip the cycle of a person’s return to dust . When a person bears in mind this one fact, one will feel small and becomes humble before God in who’s hand is the breath of life in every living creature
- ❖ When a person bears in mind his inconsistency through the spiritual way. He stands before God like a novice , and repeats with Saint Moses the Black ‘Never trust yourself while you remain in the body so that the power of darkness will pass away from you’

1.4.4 Receiving humiliation with gladness

The Lord allows the soul to the school of suffering to purify it from the artificial splendour glare of the world ,as the Lord says *“For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.” (Mark 9:49)*. In dealing with insults, the soul moves up from resentment to acceptance accompanied by a degree of anger. Then an improved stage of an inward and outward control, and finally receives insults without losing the inner peace which culminates in receiving humiliation with joy *“So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” (Acts 5:41)*. Each stage rids the soul of the false glory and make us grow in humility, this is why St. Paul says *“Therefore I*

take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:10).

1.4.5 Accepting the cross of humility

Humility is obvious in a person's behaviour in his relationship with God, with others, and with self. Humility in one's behaviour (specially toward others) is a cross in itself. If a person does not carry this cross for the Love of God then his humility is fake and the pride is still in him, obviously such person leads an unhealthy life.

Humble behaviour may be witnessed through:

- ❖ Willing submission to the leaders and elders out of love and appreciation for their services and experience. *“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” (1 Pet 5:5)*
- ❖ Being quick to apologise to those whom we do wrong out of genuine sincerity and humility and not for the sake of reciting empty words . The Lord teaches us that *“..... if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Words” (Matt 6: 23-24)*
- ❖ Doing tasks which others consider menial. St. Paul teaches us *“..... Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.” (Rom 12: 16).*
- ❖ Not to justify one's mistakes nor finding excuses for sin, or making others join us in our errors.
- ❖ Avoiding boasting. We are not to be the first to speak, we are not to glorify ourselves through our deeds in search of praise. Remember that only the deeds done in private are rewarded *“.....and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matt 6:18).*
- ❖ Not taking the front or head seats. The Lord rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for doing so *“They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues,” (Matt 23:6).*
- ❖ Giving preference to all people over ourselves. *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” (Phil 2:3).*

These behaviours have great influence in acquiring genuine humility when practiced for the love of God and not for seeking the praise of people: Firstly because virtues go with actions. Secondly, outward behaviour has inward influence on a person's soul.

‘The inward and outward persons are united to each other. Each one is attached to the other to a certain degree. If the body becomes humble, it creates the inclination towards humility in the heart or strengthen it if it already exists’ - St. Augustine.

1.4.6 Not to boast of spiritual gifts and acts of grace

When the soul is beautified with gifts and supernatural acts of grace, it is not because of worthiness, but *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,” (Eph 4:12).* For this reason every glory must be

attributed to God who bestowed these gifts and graces, “....., *as it is written, He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*” (1 Cor 1:31).

St. Ambrose says : ‘This matter (not to boast of the spiritual gifts), no-one can perform or rectify except through special and very great grace’

The life of saints is a very good example as St. Simon the Cobbler who disappeared after moving Al Moqatam Mountain.

1.5 The blessings of humility

1.5.1 Reconciliation with God

Adam’s sin was that of pride and ego which became a barrier between him and God “*....for God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble*” (1 Pet 5:5). For this reason God requires the soul to persevere with humility so that He reconciles with it, “*.....And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?*” (Micah 6:8)

The bible emphasize that “*Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.*” (Prov. 16:18, 18:21). ‘Destruction’ means also the ‘destruction’ of relationship between the human being and God. When the human being reconciles himself with God, his original status among God’s creatures is restored “*Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.*” (Luke 10: 19). Satan , together with all his forces and snares is defeated. It was once said about St. Anthony that he saw the snares of Satan all over the earth, he sighed ‘Lord, who will escape these?’ The Lord answered ‘Those who are humble will escape them’. On another occasion Satan admitted to St. Makarios that he is only defeated through humility’

1.5.2 Humility maintains God’s grace

Humility maintains God’s grace within a person. The bible says “*Surely He scorns the scornful, But gives grace to the humble.*” (Prov. 3:34), St. James in his epistle says “*.....God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*” (James 4:6). As the ash keeps the warmth of embers and conceals them, so does humility keep our spiritual warmth and virtues .

1.5.3 Humility lifts up the soul

The Lord puts His trust only in the humble “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*” (James 4:10). St. Mary also , in her praise said “*He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly.*” (Luke 1:52) .

The Lord looked upon and received the humble tax collector more than the pompous arrogant Pharisee (Luke 18: 9- 14).

St. John the Baptist said about himself that “*.....whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.*”(Mark 1:7). However, Jesus described him as “*., among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist;.....*” (Luke 7:28).

The gentile Centurion described himself as unworthy to receive the Lord under his roof, yet the Lord described his faith as “*....., I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel*” (Matt 8:10).

Humility raises the saints from the corners of oblivion to the seats of glory. St John El-daragy says ‘through arrogance only, Satan fell from Heaven, (*Is 14:12-16*) and it is humility only that raises the person to Heaven. This is why our Lord says “...*whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*” (*Matt. 23:12*).

The book of Proverbs sums it up “*By humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches and honour and life.*” (*Prov. 22:4*).

1.5.4 Humility qualifies the soul for the spiritual gifts

If the spiritual gifts, fruits, virtues, and revelation of mysteries were gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon the soul, then the most receptive of all are those who are humble. The Father finds joy in revealing His mysteries to those who learn humility from His Son. “*I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes....., for so it seemed good in Your sight.*” (*Matt. 11:2-26*).

St Isaac the Serian said: ‘arrogance precedes destruction and humility precedes gifts’

1.5.5 Humility gives birth to tranquillity, joy, peace and comfort

Anxiety and unrest dwell in the hearts of the arrogant. Haman’s heart was eaten by fury each time Mordecai did not offer him respect (*Est 3:1-6*). The humble, on the other hand, enjoy the life of tranquillity and peace. The Lord says “... *learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*” (*Matt. 11:29*). St. Paul has the same experience “*Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us*” (*2 Cor 7:6*)

St Bakhomius says ‘Be humble so that you may be happy because happiness and humility go hand in hand’

1.5.6 Humility gives endurance to oppressions and help to overcome them

An arrogant person always complains of being unfairly treated. A humble person feels that tribulations are due to sinfulness. Micah the prophet of the OT says “*Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation;because I have sinned against Him...*” (*Micah 4:7-9*). For this reason it is easier for the humble to accept the sufferings thankfully and hope in salvation. David says “*The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me.*” (*Ps 116:6*). St Isaac says ‘God allows tests and ordeals to come our way so that we may persevere with humility. If we harden our hearts towards those tests and ordeals, God will harden the tests and make them more difficult. However, if we face tests with humility and a crushed heart, the Lord will accompany the test with compassion’.

We notice that humility is one of the major factors in combating the sins of adultery and lust.

1.5.7 Humility lifts God’s anger and gives answer to prayers

When a person’s heart becomes humble in seeking God, the Lord does answer, lifts his anger and fury as in the case of Hezekiah “... *Hezekiah was sick and near death,*

and he prayed to the LORD; and He spoke to him and gave him a sign. But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favour shown him, for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.” (2 Chr. 32:24-26) . Refer also to (2 Chr. 33:12, 2 Chr. 7:14, Zep 2:3).

1.5.8 Humility gives us a prominent place in the kingdom

Our Lord starts the beatitudes by *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:3)* . The poor in Spirit are those whose humility and simplicity make them worthy of joining the Kingdom. They are likened to children *“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 18:4)* . Thus the saints who led a life of humility and poverty in this world as St Anthony, St Paul ,,,,,,, will *“....shine Like the brightness of the firmament,Like the stars forever and ever.” (Dan. 12:3).*

1.6 Humility: the foundation for spiritual life and all other virtues

Christ the Lord is the corner-Stone and foundation of the Spiritual life. All acts of the spiritual life as believing in His sacrifice on the cross , hoping in His next coming and the eternal life , accepting His love and share it with the brethren , and our struggle towards heaven , are in need to humility.

Humility is like excavating the ground to get the soil out and making our Lord the foundation *“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor 3:11).* The building thus becomes as solid as rock.

- ❖ Without humility it is difficult for the soul to believe in Christ, in His divinity and incarnation and in His Gospel. The arrogance of the ego led to all the heretics in the church history e.g. Arius, Nestor, Makdonios,... Up to this day, wherever there is ego, there is heresy and divisions .
- ❖ Without humility a person cannot hope for eternal life, one becomes cocooned in what is visually obvious and physically tangible and therefore endless philosophies and heresies are invented .
- ❖ Love and humility support each other . The more we discover God’s Love, the more humble we become and the more Christ’s love is poured upon us through the Holy Spirit. We then become more humble which is reflected in more love to our brethren .
- ❖ Humility gives security to the soul in its spiritual battles: prayers, fasting, repentance, endurance, asceticism, chastity, meditation, dealing with others, self-denial , so that the soul is not perverted by the false glory which devours all its virtues.

For this reason the fathers compared humility to the foundation of a building. The higher we desire it to be, the deeper the foundation.

‘Bear in mind that your prevail over chastity and virtue is not a result of your own devotion or virtue – The Heavenly Grace carries you lest you move and fall. Always remember this. If the idea of pride comes to your mind, weep, mourn, sob put your face to the ground and remember your shortcomings so that you may be saved from this idea and acquire humility’ St Isaac the Serian.