

## CHAPTER 4

# HUMILITY

**"Whoever does not want to enter through the door of humility, would not find the Divine Pasture, and who wants to enter from another door is a thief"**

**(St. John El-Dargy)**

- A) A general word about humility**
- B) Humility in the life of the Lord and His saints**
- C) Humility is the basis of all virtues**
- D) What does humility do?**
- E) How do we possess humility?**
- F) Acquiring humility**
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## A) A GENERAL WORD ABOUT HUMILITY

### WHAT IS HUMILITY?

Humility is not the mere outer appearance of a person, such as dressing in rough clothes, talking with a soft voice, or walking with a bowed head. Also it is not merely expressed by words a person repeats to others saying that he is a sinner, wicked and not worthy. Neither it is expressed by words one repeats to God declaring his triviality, humiliation and spiritual poverty. It is not just this, because, if so, then it is possible for everybody to become a humble person. **Humility is a life one lives between himself and God, in which he feels he is nil and nothing, even less than nothing, and whatever good or righteousness he has, is from God, and without God he is but dust, darkness and evil.**

**St. Isaac once said** "A person who mentions his pitfalls and sins to humble himself, though this is very good, is not called a humble person. A humble person is he who comes nearer to humility and tries to reach it. A truly humble person does not need to convince himself or force his thoughts to have the feeling of humility, or invent reasons for that. But it is natural that he counts himself normally as nothing". **St. John El-Dargy also said** "It is not he who insults or blames himself that is the humble person, because who can not bear himself? But the truly humble person is he who stands the blames and the insults of others without diminishing his love for them".

Thus, humility is not an easy simple matter, but it requires us to control our will, crush our stray inclinations, and mortify our bodily desires. "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all" (Mark 9:35) [All Bible quotations are from "The New King James" version, except the Apocrypha which are from "The New English" version]. This is how our Lord taught us by His life and by His sayings, and no matter how humble a person becomes, he finds Jesus is still more than him in His amazing humility. One might strive to become even more humble, but he finds that it is impossible to reach the degree of humility of the Praised and Holy Jesus in what He did to raise us to the Father.

**Again, humility is not a virtue which stands by itself, but it is the basis of all other virtues,** and without humility, we cannot possess a virtue, and any virtue without it is void, rejected by God and is counted against us, not for us.

**Humility** - or self denial, as we like to call it - **is not achieved by just reading books, listening to spiritual talks about it, or even by living together with saints, but it is a close life of the soul with God,** which does not end, in which a person strives to free himself from the prison of the body and from the ties of deceitful sin.

**Humility is the narrow door which the seekers of heaven must enter, the rough road upon which they must tread, and it is the Cross which the faithful disciple carries, following**

the steps of his Teacher and Master, in His way to the city which has the foundations which are made and laid by God. Is there a restriction, difficulty and a cross, heavier than a person defeating his own desires, and bearing humiliation, poverty and defame?!

Humility is a critical test for the seekers of God. **The wise Jesus Ben Sirach said "For gold is assayed by fire, and the Lord proves men in the furnace of humiliation"** (Sirach 5:2).

**This is how our saintly fathers understood humility, and explained it in their sayings; each according to his experience. St. John El-Dargy summarised some of them and added by saying:** "About humility, some said it is forgetting every good deed a person did, and another said it is the person counting himself the greatest failure, the least and more sinful than other people. Another said it is the mind knowing its weakness. It is also crushing one's soul and refusing one's will. I say, humility is grace in the soul, which no one knows unless he possesses it". The Lord said "Learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). That is, not by an angel, or a human, and not from a book you learn humility of the heart, but from Me, and He continued "and you will find rest for your souls". That is rest from pains and evil thoughts.

## **THE HONOR OF THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY**

1 - If pride is considered the worst vice, the mother which begets, surrounds and strengthens many serious sins, **then without doubt, humility is the top mothering virtue, which begets virtues and saves from many sins.** But it is considered - as we shall see - absolutely the basis of all the virtues. Hence, he who masters humility, lays a good strong foundation for the building of his spiritual life. It is described by one of the fathers as "The tree of life, whoever eats from it never dies".

2 - Humility is especially honored, **because it was the Lord Jesus Himself who taught it, in the forefront of his teachings, by the example of His life, His deeds, and in His divine teachings.** The Lord Jesus did not say "Learn from me the work of miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead", but He said "Learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29), because true humility is stronger than haughtiness, and worshipping God with humility is better than doing miracles and signs.

Our teacher St. Paul calls the mind of humility "the mind of Christ", as he says "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 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 servant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-7).

**St. Pachomius** the founder of the coenobitic (communal) monasticism said "**Seeing somebody with humble and pure heart, is better than any scene, because through him you see God the unseen**". Once, a monk said to St. Timothy the hermit "I find that my mind is always with God". The saint replied "Batter still is to see yourself below all creation, as there is no fall from humility".

**3 - The honor of this virtue results from its effectiveness:** St. Augustine said: "Humility attracts God to it, though He is Haughty. As you humble yourself He comes down to you, but if you become proud, He leaves you all together". He also said: "O holy humility, how high is your superiority and your distinction from pride"! **Pride expelled angels from heaven, and humility made the Son of God come down from heaven to be incarnate on earth. Pride led Adam out of paradise, and humility admitted the thief to it.** Pride confused the language of the mighty (at the tower of Babel), and humility gathered peoples with different tongues. Pride transformed Nebuchadnezzar into a wild beast, while humility raised Joseph to be the controller of all Egypt, and put him in the forefront of the people of Israel. Pride drowned Pharaoh in the Red Sea, while humility lifted and elevated Moses.

**4. The honor of this virtue comes also from its relation to other virtues.** Once St. Macarius the Great, the father of the monks was asked "Which is the greatest virtue?". He replied "If pride is considered the worst of all vices, to the extent that it cast a host of angels out of heaven, no doubt humility is the greatest of all virtues, because it is able to elevate the humble, even if he is a sinner".

**5. The great honor humility gains, is due to the Divine Graces which accompany it and result from it.** St. John El-Dargy once said "If you hear that somebody acquired in a short time, a great gift, such as lack of suffering, or making miracles, be sure that he acquired that through humility". **Also St. Isaac said "Gifts are not offered for the good deeds themselves, but because of the humility by which they are done".**

**6. What gives humility greater honor is that God loves and looks at the humble** "Though the Lord is on high, Yet He regards the lowly" (Psalm 138:6), but even He lives with them "For thus says the High and Mighty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones"" (Isaiah 57:15).

**7. Humility is the holy robe the saints put on and wrap themselves with** "God gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5), and the road they walk "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1,2). Our teacher Paul also said "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, **humbleness** of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Colossians 3:12).

8. In the world to come, the humble will enjoy a special distinct status and will be considered the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord of Glory said "Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4).

**9. Finally, it is the Christian virtue which the world scientists and great philosophers do not practice or teach.** It was said that the great philosopher Aphlatone made a party and invited some other philosophers who are known to be ascetic towards world glories, among them was the philosopher Diogenis. For the party, Aphlatone decorated his house with carpets and costly covers. Diogenis entered the house with dirty shoes and worn out clothes and started to tread upon these

carpets and covers. When Aphlatone questioned his behaviour, he answered "I tread upon the pride and arrogance of Aphlatone". When Aphlatone heard this answer he said "It is true that you tread upon the arrogance of Aphlatone, but you do that by another arrogance".

## **B) HUMILITY IN THE LIFE OF THE LORD AND HIS SAINTS**

### **HUMILITY IN THE LIFE OF THE LORD JESUS**

**Humility is the beautiful robe, truly amazing, which our Lord put on and in it He manifested Himself to us!!** It was not possible for earthly people to see the Lord of Lords and God of gods in the glory of His Divinity. In the past, He said to His elect Moses the prophet "You cannot see My face; for no man can see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20), and when in the past He descended with His glory on Mount Sinai, the mountain was blazing in fire smoking (Exodus 19), and this was the case "Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast", (Exodus 19:12, 13) and so terrifying was the sight that Moses said: "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling"" (Hebrews 12: 18-21).

**In the Old Testament, the Israelites did not dare come near the mountain upon which Your Glory descended, but in the New Testament - the Testament of grace and humility - Your holy mother carried You and Simeon the elder took You up in his arms (Luke 2:28).** You ate and drank with the people, and You gave Yourself a living food for them, to abide in You and You in them. It was said that You are "A consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). How did this fire which consumed Your opponents and destroyed the cities (2 Peter 2:6), change to peace which fills the mind, thought and heart, until it is said about You that "You Yourself are our peace" (Ephesians 2:14)!!

**It was not possible for the people to see "The Holy Who inhabit the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3), except in the robe of humility.** For this reason, St. Augustine paired the incarnation with humility, and in that he says that the Son of God became incarnate to make peace between man and God, and to cure the heart of men from the illness of pride. He realised the first aim by His death and the second by His humility. Thus the life of Christ was love, humility and pain.

**St. Basil the Great displayed the life of the Lord Jesus from His birth to His death, and concluded that Christ by all His deeds, taught us in particular the virtue of humility :**

The Lord revealed His humility by sharing our nature when "He made Himself of no

reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of man" (Philippians 2:7). He also showed it in His birth from a poor mother in a dismal place, lower than the poorest places in this world. He showed it in His escape from the face of the tyrant Herod as if He was weak, while He is the port for the tired and the haven for the escapee, and in His submission to His pure mother and to Joseph the carpenter (Luke 2:51).

The Lord showed His humility also when presenting Himself to John the Baptist to be baptised by him, as one of the sinner and in His elected life of poverty which St. Paul expressed by saying "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Again, He showed it in His submission to the Law and in the manner of His entering Jerusalem "Behold your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey" (Matthew 21:5), and in the many insults He received from the Scribes, the Pharisees and the head priests, which ended in His death on the Cross, the death of shameful and cursed people (Psalm 22:6, 69:9, Isaiah 52:3). This is expressed by the Apostle saying "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" (Philippians 2:8).

**The two saints Augustine and Eronimos noticed that the Lord Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount by talking about humility by His saying "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3) and thus He started His preaching with the subject of humility, and in humility He walked all His life and ended with it to His death.**

The Lord Jesus lived poor, even less than the birds of the air and the foxes of the field and He said about Himself "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20).

The Lord used to hide His glory and display His shame; He showed His glory on the mount of Transfiguration to only three of His disciples, while He displayed His shame and death to many nations. The reason for His crucifixion was written on His cross in the three main languages of the world at that time. Even the three disciples to whom He exposed His glory, He commanded them - as he came down from the mountain - to tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead (Matthew 17:9). When the multitude wanted to make Him their king, He departed by Himself hiding from them (John 17:9), while when they wanted to insult and despise Him, He gave Himself to them by His own will, when the people and the demons were praising Him, He rebuked them and did not allow them to speak (Luke 4:41), and when He was reviled He was silent and did not open His mouth! (1 Peter 2:23).

**The first sin which caused the fall of our race was pride and no wonder we see God treats it with humility.**

**Perhaps the most distinct and most fascinating picture in the life of the Lord of Glory, is when He bent down and washed the feet of the disciples and wiped them with the towel with which He was girded (John 13:3-5). When John, the meek disciple, recorded the glory of the**

Divinity of the Saviour by saying "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God" (John 13:3), he then recorded His amazing humility and said "He rose after supper and laid aside His garment, took a towel and girded Himself. After that 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). What does the behaviour of the Lord of Glory indicate when "He took off His garments, washed the disciples' feet and wiped them"? . **Taking off His garments points to discarding personal dignity and self glory, washing the feet is putting down the self to the greatest extent in humble service which denies its toil; and wiping the feet shows compassion, care, in deep humility.**

After washing their feet and wiping them He followed it by the spiritual command saying to them "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them" (John 13:12-17).

## **HUMILITY IN THE LIFE OF THE SAINTS**

\* "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24).

\* "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27).

Denying oneself is considered a first condition for Christian discipleship. Those who loved the Lord, those who feared Him and His saints understood these golden words and kept them in their hearts printing them with letters of light. With them, they enlightened themselves and lightened to others the road to glory. They strived to deny themselves following the footsteps of their Saviour in His amazing humility. In their ears echo His divine words "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant is above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master" (Matthew 10:24-25), and they obtained great divine glory.

The saints understood that humility is the cornerstone of their spiritual live building. They concentrated all their efforts to obtain it. All other ascetic deeds could not stand without humility, they would even be **rejected. This is well expressed by mother Theodorah who said "No asceticism, striving or fasting can replace complete humility"**. It was said about a hermit who used to cast out bad spirits, that he asked them: How are you casted out? Is it by fasting? They answered: we eat nothing. Is it by striving? They said: we never sleep. Is it by leaving the world? They answered: We live in the desert and uninhabited places. He said how are you then casted out? They answered: "There is nothing **that crushes us other than humility"**.

**The Saints despised themselves to an extent which amazed the devils and destroyed their weapons against them. Some saints used to have the devils fight them face to face and**

**they were victorious by the weapon of humility and poverty in the spirit.** It was said about **St. Anthony's** striving, that the devils used to fight him in person. He used to tell them "You are strong, what do you want from me, a weak person, what kind of strength do I have that make all of you gather against me? Don't you know that I am but dust, dirt, nothing and unable to kill the weakest among you?" He then used to throw himself on the ground crying "Lord help me and strengthen my weakness. Lord do not leave me. Do not let any of them be stronger than me, as they think I am something. You know Lord that I am unable to stand against the weakest among them". After hearing this prayer, which is full of life and humility, the devils used to run away, unable to come near him,

**The Saints were giants in the spirit. Yet they felt they were sinners, or even chief sinners. Their lives were full of tears in repentance for the smallest sins they did as humans. They did not force themselves to moan or to weep, but these were their feelings when they discovered the reality of themselves in the light of the greatness of God, His humility and His love.** This is what we realise in their sayings.

Abraham in the past said about himself "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord" (Genesis 18:27). And when John the Baptist was asked "What do you say about yourself and your message? he said: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the Lord"" (John 1:22-23). **The great St. Paul considered himself** "as the filth of the world, the offscourings of all things" (1 Corinthians 4:13), even he called himself "the chief sinner" (1 Timothy 1:15). In fact they were not as they said they were, but their self denial raised them in the sight of God and their feeling of their extreme lowliness accentuated their virtues.

In this, the saints resemble a tree loaded with many fruits, whose branches lean towards the ground, unlike the empty branches which stand haughtily upward! They are also like lit coal covered with a layer of ashes veiling the fire. This however does not hide the heat and warmth radiating from the coal, from which people get warmth.

**The saints in their humility did not stop striving and could not feel they strived enough, as long as they were in the flesh, in spite of what they achieved from high spiritual levels. Their lives were thus continuous striving in the road to Christian perfection, with steady steps by which they ascended the stairs of heaven.** From the expressions of a saint to one of his disciples is "If your thought praised you, ask it why do you praise me?, I am like a sailor in the sea. Even when it appears calm, it might turn rough, and I am in danger of drowning as long as I do not reach my destination. Many were very close to the port, but they perished".

**The Saints reached high spiritual status for which they deserved divine graces and gifts. Yet they were careful to refer all glory, all deeds, and even everything, to the might of God.** In one of the miracles of **St. Macarius the Great**, he posed a question to a dead man about a certain matter and the dead man answered him. When he saw his disciples amazed, he told them "This matter happened not for my sake because I am nothing, but God did that for the sake of the widow of this man and his orphan children".

**The Saints were also very careful to hide their virtues.** As a kind of teaching or instruction to their disciples, when they were obliged to mention a miracle they did, or a divine power God performed with them, they did not allow themselves to mention that it happened to them, but they referred it to others.

**Their conduct in the road of humility lead them to a high spiritual degree, which they called "The death to the world".** That is how they lived dead to the world, but alive to God in Christ. Hence they withstood insults, curses and humiliations, and this was obvious in their lives and teachings. **St. Macarius the Great wanted to give a lesson to a brother who asked his advice.** St. Macarius told him to go to the graves and curse the dead there. The brother went and cursed and stoned the dead. St. Macarius then asked him "Did they answer you back?", he answered "No". He told the brother "Go tomorrow and praise the dead instead". Again he went and highly praised them. St. Macarius again asked him if they answered him back, he said no. Then St. Macarius told him "If you have really died with Christ and were buried with Him, be like those dead people, because curses or praises do not affect the dead. This is how you can be saved".

## **C) HUMILITY BASIS OF ALL VIRTUES**

**The Saints agreed that humility is the basis of all virtues.** St. Kibrianos calls it "Basis of holiness" and St. Eronimos calls it "First Christian Virtue". They describe it as the root of a plant or a tree. **Humility to other virtues is like the root to the tree. The tree could not grow, bear fruits or live unless its roots are established deep in the soil.** The taller the tree is, the deeper its roots are into the ground. **The fathers also described Humility as the foundation of the house.** They also said that the foundation of a small house is not like that of a huge house. If we wanted a taller house, we need to dig deeper for its foundation. Likewise is humility which carries the building of our spiritual life. **The flower withers if it is cut from its tree. Likewise virtue dries up quickly if it is separated from the foundation of humility.**

**Father John Cassian said** "It was accepted by early ascetic fathers as a principle in spiritual walk that it is impossible for anyone to attain purity of heart or perfection of one of the virtues unless he believes first that his striving and his whole toil is not sufficient for what he is asking for. But they are void without a special help and grace from God, and this is humility itself. Hence the Saints ruled that this is the basis of all virtues".

**Humility is considered not only the basis of all virtues but also their supporter and helper, and because of it, the help of God overflows immensely over the humble person.** Father Isaac said "Know that your progress in chastity and virtue is not the result of your prudence and your virtues, but of Divine Grace which carries you on the palm of its hand else you move and slip. Remember that always. Also if you get a haughty thought, cry, be sad, fall on the ground and remember your transgressions, in the hope that you are delivered from this thought and attain humility. As soon as your mind is filled with the thought of humility, your sins are forgiven without deed. How many big and difficult sins, humility was able to get rid of?".

**Is there any conflict between the saying that humility is the basis of the virtues and the saying that faith is the basis?** Not at all. Laying the foundation of a building requires two jobs; digging until we reach the rock bed then laying down the foundation. The role of humility is the digging and the deepening until one reaches the rock, Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Hence the first stone is laid down. You dig the ground well through humility, knowing yourself well, getting rid of what is inside of falling dust, which is depending on the self. Hence, the foundation is strong for the faith.

**We here display some examples for different virtues to see how humility is the basis of all of them, and without it they cannot stand.**

**(1) Faith:** Faith needs humility; as proud thought does not easily accept faith. The Lord Jesus said "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another?" (John 5:44). Humility is not only necessary for attaining faith but also for keeping it. For a good proof, heresies result from pride. Our teacher St. Paul said "In the last days perilous times will come: For men will be ...boasters, proud, blasphemers" (2 Timothy 3:1,2).

**(2) Hope:** Hope needs humility to support and strengthen it. One does not hope for what he sees, but for what he does not see. The person who depends on his knowledge and thinking, does not accept what he does not see. Hoping for the unseen requires humility of the mind.

**(3) Love: Humility and love support and strengthen one another.** St. John El-Dargy said "Nothing is superior to humility and love, because humility raises as the Lord said and love holds up as St. Paul said "Love never fails and does not vanish" (1 Corinthians 13:8). When we talk about love we mean our love to God and to one another.

**Our love to God is supported and strengthened by humility.** When man realises his many sins and bad reputation and beside that he feels that God is still faithful in His love and caring for him, his feeling of humility results in inflaming his heart with the love of God. The same feelings used to and still move the saints to the love of God. This is how St. Mary sang her everlasting praise "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant" (Luke 1:46-48).

**Concerning our love to one another, it is in great need of humility.** Hate, quarrels between people, evil thinking, condemning one another and envy, all result from pride. A humble person is not unhappy if he is not praised or if another person is praised. He wishes everybody well and feels that others deserve honor more than him, or as John the Baptist said about Jesus "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). This is also expressed by our teacher Paul "Being of one accord, of one mind ..., but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:2, 3). Such nice feelings will without doubt strengthen the ties between people. St. John the beloved said "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also

ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16).

More than that people dislike the behaviour of the proud person with them. If he errs he does not admit his error, he does not obey others and does not forgive, he considers that a weakness of his. He is always angry, insists on his ideas and does not stop talking, thinking that this adds to his personality. But a meek and humble person is the complete opposite of that. The deeper a well is, the purer is its water. Likewise, the more humble a person is, the more he is loved by all people.

**If we have talked about humility as an important factor to establish love, we should not forget to say that love also from its side strengthens humility and establishes it.** This phenomena is the same in our relation with God and with people. The strong love of God to us increases our lowliness. When we meditate on the love of God which made Him give His Divine self for us, and how He withstood insults from man to whom He gave "life, breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25), all that move us to lowliness and humility.

**(4) Prayer:** Prayer becomes empty of strength if it lacks humility, it is even rejected. Ben Sirach says "**Prayer of the humble penetrates the clouds, persists until it is there, and leaves when visited by the almighty**" (Sirach 32:17). Also the lowly Judith, sitting down on her bed clothes in sacks and sitting in ashes, cried loud to God saying "**For thy might lies not in numbers nor thy sovereign power in strong men; but thou art the God of the humble, the help of the poor, the supporter of the weak, the protector of the desperate, the deliverer of the hopeless**" (Judith 9:11). Our Lord was also pleased with the prayer of the tax collector (Luke 18:13, 14) and praised him.

**(5) The Rest of the Virtues:** What we have said about the relation between humility and the above mentioned virtues, **is also said about the rest of the virtues** such as choice of poverty, obedience and chastity (purity). We shall see when we deal with the subject of "life of purity", how that the wars of sexual immorality may intensify in a person for sometimes, to chastise him because of the pride of his heart, and how humility and petition in front of God lifts these wars.

## **D) WHAT DOES HUMILITY DO?**

Humility has many blessings. Where humility is, the meek Lord descends with His blessings and graces and He is our best support in our spiritual striving. **St. Aphram El-Soriany said "Who wishes to move a rock from its place, places a lever under it not above it. Hence he shifts it easily, and this is a model for humility"**. We can realise some of the blessings of humility from the following:

### **1 - Humility Takes Man Back to His Original Status:**

Pride was the first fall of man. No wonder if humility takes him back to his original status before fall, by the Divine Incarnation. Pride expelled the first man from the paradise and humility is able to bring him back. By pride, man fell, lost his dignity and lost control over himself and over all the creatures which were created for him to be under his dominion (Genesis 1:28).

By humility, man gets up, regains his dignity and his control over himself and over all the creatures. **St. Paul the simple, the disciple of St. Anthony**, started his ascetic life after the age of sixty. In a few years he acquired great grace and he performed miracles which St. Anthony the great did not do. He performed them through humility supported by the prayers of his aged teacher and his obedience to him.

**St. Anthony said to his disciples** "My children, why did the Lord Jesus take off His garment, girdle Himself, pour water and washed the feet of those who were less than Him? Does not He teach us humility by what He did? All those who want to regain their original nature, cannot do that except through humility".

### **2 - By Humility You Defeat the Devils:**

This is a natural consequence. The proud Satan who fell through his pride cannot tolerate to see a humble person. Satan who let our whole race fall through pride, is scared of a person who fights him with the weapon of humility and runs away with shame!

**The Saints reported this fact in their striving. They left their spiritual experiences to us, as well as what they saw from revelations and what they heard from the devils - as unintended confessions - concerning the devils' weaknesses and the secret of the saints' victory.**

**It was said about St. Anthony**, that he saw the traps of the devil laid down on the whole earth. St. Anthony sighed and said "Lord who can escape from all these traps?". He then heard a voice from heaven saying "The humble can". **It was also said about St. Macarius the Great** that the devil met him once and said "Woe to you Macarius, whatever you do, I likewise do: you fast, and I do not eat. You strive and I do not sleep, but you defeat me by one thing. St. Macarius asked "By what?". The devil answered "By humility only you defeat me". One of the old pious monks said "If a monk with humility asks his brother to forgive him, the devils burn down".

**A strange story is mentioned in the book "The Paradise of the Monks", which confirms what we mentioned:** Two monks were living in the desert in a saintly manner which urged the devil to try to disperse them. One evening the younger monk lit a lamp and put it up on

the stand. By a devil's movement, the lamp fell and the light was put out. The older monk got angry and hit the younger monk. The younger monk humbly told the older monk "Be patient with me my brother and I shall light the lamp once more". When God saw the patience of the younger monk, He tortured this devil till the morning. This devil went and told the chief devil who was meeting with a priest of idols. The loving Lord willed that the priest hear what this devil was saying to his chief. When the priest of the idols heard how the devil was tormented from the humility of this monk, he himself left every thing, believed and became a monk. Also from the beginning of his monastic life he practised complete humility and used to say "Humility can defeat, tie and untie all the power of the enemy. I heard the devils talking to one another saying "Every time we try to sow enmity among the monks, we find them receive that with humility, and ask forgiveness of one another, which cancels our efforts"".

### 3 - Humility Preserves God's Grace in Man

Humility is the best preserver of God's grace in man. It is the right climate which keeps grace alive and working in us. The person who advertises his virtue for the love of appearance, weakens and eventually loses it. Ashes keep the heat of the burning coal and covers it up as if it is not burning. Likewise humility keeps our spiritual warmth and hides our virtues to preserve them. Egypt's Pharaoh used to kill all male children born to the Hebrew women at the time Moses was born. But Moses was not killed because his mother hid him for a while. Likewise, the virtue, which is born in the soul, if it is not hidden from the spiritual Pharaoh, i.e., the devil, it would not grow and live.

### 4 - God Exalts the Humble

St. Peter said "Be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to **the humble**. Therefore **humble yourselves** under the mighty hand of God, that **He may exalt you in due time**" (1 Peter 5:5-6). St. James the apostle said "**Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up**" (James 4:10). In the past, God said by Isaiah the prophet "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). **St. John El-Dargy said** "If the devil had fallen from the sky by pride alone, then humility alone raises man to the sky". God said "Whoever exalts himself will be abased, and who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).

**The gentile centurion** who with humility described himself as being unworthy for Christ to enter his home, was preferred to the Jews and was praised by Christ who said "I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (Matthew 8:10). But **the Pharisee** who had virtues and good work, and prayed in the temple proudly enumerating his virtues saying "I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess", he was not justified. On the contrary, God preferred the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18: 9-14).

**Again John the Baptist who said that he is unworthy to loose Jesus' sandal strap** (Luke 3:16) **became beloved of Jesus, and the same hands of which he said unworthy to loose Jesus'**

**sandal straps, God honored by letting them laid on Jesus' head in the Jordan river.** That was when Christ came humbly to John to be baptised from him saying "For thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

Hannah, mother of Samuel the prophet, said "God raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory" (1 Samuel 2:8). David the prophet expressed the same meanings in his psalm (Psalm 113:7,8). St. Mary said in her everlasting Magnificat which she recited to her relative Elizabeth "God has shown strength with His arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty" (Luke 1:51-53).

St. Paul, after describing the amazing humility of our Lord Jesus Himself said "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. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth" (Philippians 2:7-10).

Humility exalted the young boy David, and made him a king over Israel. Likewise, humility exalted so many unknown saints to the seat of honor. St. Aphram El-Soriany said "We are in need of humility to attract to us the mercies of God, as it is written, because of our humility, God remembered us and delivered us from our enemies" (Psalm 136:23, 24).

## **5 - Humility Reveals God's Mysteries and Qualifies for His Gifts:**

God reveals His mysteries to the humble. David the prophet said "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant" (Psalms 25:14) and Solomon said "But His secret counsel is with the upright" (Proverbs 3:32). Our Lord Jesus Himself after He rebuked the city of Capernaum for its pride said "Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Matthew 11: 23-26). The babes here are none other than the humble. **St. Isaac said "Gifts are not offered for good works themselves, but for the humility by which they are done"**. He also said humility is born from sadness, and gifts are given for humility. Thus gifts are not given for good works nor for the sadness but because of the humility which is born from it". He said also "Pride precedes fall and humility precedes obtaining the gifts".

## **6 - Fruits of Humility Are Joy and Peace in the Heart:**

From the fruits of humility are comfort for the soul, peace for the heart, and indescribable joy. The Lord of Glory said "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). David the prophet said "My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; **the humble shall hear of it and be glad**" (Psalms 34:2). He also said "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness" (Psalms 30:11). **St. Pachomius the founder of the Coenobitic (communal) monasticism said**

**"Be humble in order to be joyful, because joy goes hand in hand with humility".**

Anxiety and unrest are in the hearts of the proud and anger fills these hearts. An example of that is Haman who saw Mordecai in the king's gate, where he did not stand or tremble before him, and he was filled with indignation against Mordecai (Esther 5:9). Among the means which give comfort to the soul is confessing one's error. This distinguishes between the humble and the proud; who because of their pride refuse to acknowledge their mistakes, thinking that this is against their dignity. This in turn is reflected in their lives as a result of their dishonesty in not practising the sacrament of confession, because of their pride hiding behind their shyness.

### **7 - Humility Gives Wisdom:**

Solomon in his wisdom said "When pride comes, then comes shame; **but with the humble is wisdom**" (Proverbs 11:2). Also he said in the Book of Wisdom about wisdom itself "Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun" (Ecclesiastes 7:11). Also David the prophet said "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalms 19:7), and the simple here are the humble. Also Jesus Ben Sirach said "**A poor man with wisdom can hold his head** high and take his seat among the great" (Sirach 11:1), and a poor man here means the humble.

St. John El-Dargy said "Meekness is the key to the door of wisdom, because God teaches the meek His ways", and **St. Aphram El-Soriany said "Inside the meek and humble man, the spirit of wisdom rests"**. St. Pachomius said "Be humble so that God guards and strengthens you, because He says that He looks to the humble. Be humble so that God fills you with wisdom, knowledge and understanding, because it is written that He guides the humble and teaches His ways to the meek".

### **8 - Humility Gives Patience and Endurance:**

The proud person grumbles all the time, is unhappy in his life, feels he is treated unjustly and others do not value him. On the contrary, the humble person knows his weaknesses, is patient when misfortunes strike him, blames himself in every thing and does not care about the opinion of others about him because his aim is to please God. He cites prophet Micah when he says "Therefore I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him" (Micah 7:7, 9). Hence we see that humility teaches us patience and endurance. Jesus Ben Sirach said "My son if you aspire to be a servant of the Lord, prepare yourself for testing. Set a straight course, be resolute and do not lose your head in time of disaster. Bear every hardship that is sent you; **be patient under humiliation**" (Sirach 2:1-4).

### **9 - Humility Helps and Saves in Time of Trouble:**

We saw how humility trains us to be patient and have endurance. Beside gaining their rewards, patience and endurance help in the times of difficulties and hardships we go through, those which are from God to test and purify us and those which God permits for our chastity. Moreover, humility gives a kind of comfort to those in trouble, as St. Paul said "Nevertheless **God, who**

**comforts the downcast, comforted us"** (2 Corinthians 7:6), and even saves from the troubles as David the prophet said **"I was brought low, and He saved me"** (Psalms 116:6).

St. Isaac said "God permits us to go through troubles and hardships - even the saints - so that we continue being humble. If we harden our hearts in the time of trouble and hardships He makes them even harder. **But if we meet the troubles with humility and lowliness in the heart, God will mix the difficulty with mercy"**. He also said "If grace finds the heart of a person starting to have haughty thoughts and self reliance, it leaves him for a while, in order to test him as he stands alone with the difficulty facing him". Another father saint said **"Humility saved many people without effort, while any effort of a person is useless without humility**, because many have toiled, and as a result became proud and hence perished.

**In the wars of sexual immorality and desire, we find that humility is one of the most important factors for overcoming them.** St. Augustine said "The greatest means in obtaining and keeping chastity is being sure that we are unable to gain it by ourselves and our effort, because whoever depends on himself and his effort deserves to loose it". Solomon also said in the Book of Wisdom "I saw that there was no way to gain possession of her (purity) except by gift of God, so I pleaded with the Lord, and from the depths of my heart I prayed to Him" (Wisdom 8:21). For this, the historian Paladios mentioned about St. Balamone who was quite old and while in his seventies he was not spared the difficult struggle with the thoughts of adultery. He fought these wars for twelve years as the attacks remained strong. One day when he thought that God has neglected him, he heard a voice from heaven saying to him "Know that the reason why God allowed these wars to remain is for you to know your weaknesses, your poverty and the little you have. So get rid of your self-reliance, be humble in front of Me and come to Me for everything". This voice gave St. Balamone great comfort and the wars stopped.

## **10 - Humility Keeps Away God's Wrath and Answers Prayers:**

The Bible gives many examples about that. It was said about Hezekiah king of Judia **"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 Chronicles 32:26). It was also said about Manasseh king of Judah - who did evil in the sight of the Lord - and was captured by the soldiers of the king of Assyria who took him with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon "Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and **humbled himself greatly** before the God of his fathers, **and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication**, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom" (2 Chronicles 33:12).

**Job also spoke to God with humility at the end of his affliction saying** "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, "Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; you said, I will question you, and you shall answer Me. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. **Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes"** (Job 42:2-6). After these

words the Lord restored Job's losses and blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning (Job 42:9, 10, 12).

**There is no stronger than the command of God Himself which He gave to Solomon son of David, which is "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).**

## **E) HOW DO WE POSSES HUMILITY?**

There are people who are humble by their own nature. Among them those who are born as simple people, as simplicity strengthens humility and let it grow. Other people acquire humility through spiritual striving and spiritual exercises. In any case, everyone can become humble by the means which leads to it. We do not deny that it is a difficult road. But it is the same difficult road with the narrow door through which few enter. Our comfort is that this road leads to the City of Joy, from which all distress, sorrow, and sighing have fled.

It is a long road - and without doubt - going into it requires continuous exercises, conquering one's will, and controlling the desires which harm the body and soul. Exercising for attaining humility is difficult in the beginning, but soon the soul will enjoy it after tasting its sweetness. **St. John El-Dargy said** "In the beginning we hardly dislike the praises from others. Then as humility grows with other virtues, one considers all good he does as nothing, even disliked, else we add to our sins. Hence, the mind is preserved with humility, and avoids to listen to or to see what is complimentary. As humility grows to a mature level, it becomes difficult to elucidate. It is like a plant which does not stop growing as long as it is watered by the water of pure virtues".

**Let us now deal with some means which help us to gain this virtue.** We wish to mention that what we say here is complemented by what we will say in the subjects of pride and honor. These three subjects form one unit which leads us to the life of self-denial.

### **(First) Perpetually Observing the Humility of Our Saviour:**

There are countless blessings in the perpetual looking to our Saviour. St. Paul urges us to do so by saying "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2), and by saying

"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Gentleness and lowliness in heart are among the first blessings we get from looking to Christ. The Lord Himself invites us to that by saying "**Learn from Me**, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). **St. John El-dargy said** "The Lord said learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. It is not from an angel, a man, or from a book you learn lowliness of heart, but from Me".

That is how we learn humility; from the meek Lord.

**St. Aphram El-Soriany said** "What can we say to God, and whichever thing we needed and He did not do for us? Did we not see God Himself humble in the image of a servant, so as to teach us humility in order that we become humble? Did we not see His Holy face which nobody can describe, spat upon, so that if we were sworn at, or harshly spoken to, we do not get angry or object? Did we not see His back stretched and whipped, so that we submit to our superiors? Did we not see His face slapped, so that, if we were rejected, we do not protest? Did we not hear about Him that He never argued or insisted on His opinion, so that we should also not insist upon our opinion and answer back? Did we not hear Him saying that He does not do anything from Himself (but from His Father), so that we do not act with our own will and our own power? **Did we not hear Him say "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart", so that we ourselves become gentle and lowly in heart!!"**".

### **(Second) Knowing One's Self:**

**What attracted the saints to the life of self-denial is not the beauty of humility as a holy virtue by itself, but also - which is more important - the discovery of their own selves in God's light.** The particles of dust could not be seen in a dark room unless the rays of the sun enter the room. Likewise our selves - with whatever sins they have - could not be seen without God's light. Hence, the fathers said "Knowing one's self is the means of knowing God". Such wisdom confirms what the ancient philosophers used to say "Know yourself". I therefore need to know myself first, and when I know it well, I will humble myself. There is no humility as such before I know myself.

We do not learn humility from mere reading books, listening to teachers, nor imitating saints. If we do that - without knowing ourselves - our humility turns out to be a false one or a kind of hypocrisy. **St. Isaac said** "Blessed is the person who knows his weakness, as such knowledge is a good principle and a source of every good thing. Because if he knows his weakness, he avoids slackness and asks for God's help and relies on Him".

Meditating on the next points help us to know our selves.

#### **(a) Meditating on One's True Self.**

We got our existence freely from God and we also were saved freely by Him "and were by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). God Himself "called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We thus became beloved, even children. This is not our right which we ever merited, but it is from God's goodness and mercy. He still keeps and supports us with His mighty hand, in every thing, so that we do not return back and fall.

**Then who am I?** I am but dust, a nonentity and nothing. At one time, the world existed and I had not existed. God created dust first, then He created me from dust. I am but less than nothing, and "nothing" is better than the sin which I commit which defiles myself and by which I offend God. God created me and He is able to guard me and He still cares for me. Prophet David said

"You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me" (Psalm 139:5). It is God's hand which keeps and cares for me so as not to return to the nothingness from which I first came. The moment in which God ceases to care for me - even for a short moment - I become nothing. St. James asked in the past "What is your life?", and he answered "It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). **St. James described our life, in its reality it is "vapour", and in its duration "appears for a little time" and in its end "it vanishes away"?** .

**Man's beauty, his mind, his strength, his build, his wisdom, his might and his dominion, are all from God. Man himself, in spite of all the advances he achieved in the circles of science, culture and civilization, is himself but dust from the earth. "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it"** (Ecclesiastics 12:7). Even the body with which man boasts, is but putrid in which worms will flourish. Job who realised this fact said "I say to corruption, you are my father, and to the worm, you are my mother and my sister" (Job 17:14).

**Knowing one's self is realized in the lives of God's saints, their sayings and their behaviour. Jacob spoke with God** and said "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies" (Genesis 32:10). **Also Moses who knew his weakness**, when God gave him the responsibility of leading his people out of Egypt, said to Him "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). Then he returned and said "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

**David, the prophet and king said in his farewell prayer in his old age** "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You. For we are aliens and pilgrims before You, as were all our fathers; our days on earth are as a shadow, and without hope. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and is all Your own" (1 Chronicles 29:14-16). St. Isaac said "Do not depend on your strength, else you will be left to your weak nature, and know your weakness from your fall. Realise that any matter one boasts with, the mighty God allows it to diminish, so that one feels humble".

#### **(b) Meditating on One's Sins:**

**Knowing one's self is also realized by knowing one's sins, shortcomings and weaknesses. St. Augustine used to pray saying "Lord, grant me to know myself and to know You"**. What helps us in acquiring this knowledge **is to measure ourselves in the light of the perfect measure which is God's Holy Book**. It is the lamp to my feet and a light to my path to the Kingdom (Psalm 119:105), and it was written for our learning (Romans 15:4). We make sure that we are asked to keep all God's commandments given in the Holy Bible for our benefit and welfare. Among these commandments is to live a perfect Christian life (Matthew 5:48), and to pursue holiness "without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

**What leads me to know myself is to compare myself with those who are better than**

**me, such as the departed saints whose life stories we read or the godly people who are still alive amongst us.** As I compare my striving with theirs, I cannot but cry from my heart "if the righteous is hardly saved, where shall I, a sinner, appear?". **Also what shows me myself and my sins, is sitting quiet with myself keeping accounts with her. Finally, which leads me to know myself is keeping in contact with spiritual people who live careful spiritual lives.**

### **(c) Meditating on One's Changing Self:**

Among what you should know about yourself, is that she is deceitful, and you can no longer trust her. Do not be deceived by some of her outside appearances, even if you have attained some virtues, and have acquired some high spiritual degrees. **St. Moses the black once said "Do not put trust in yourself as long as you are in the body, until the powers of darkness have left you".** The saints kept this advice and gained spiritual glories.

**Among the impressive stories which illustrate this fact to us is what St. Sisoury of Upper Egypt said when he was on his death bed.** This old father fell sick and was dying. He was surrounded by other monks who heard him as if he was talking to a group of people - whom they could not see. They asked him about what he was seeing. He said that he sees a group of people who came to take away his soul and he is pleading with them to give him sometime to repent. One elder monk then asked him "Would you succeed in your repentance if they give you sometime to do so?" The saint answered "If I can not do any thing, I sigh and weep". The fathers around him told him that his repentance is completed. He answered "Believe me, I do not know by myself if I even started to repent yet". When he said that, his face shone like the sun and the monks surrounding him were frightened. **He then uttered his last words saying "Look, the Lord said: Bring me the repentant of the desert", and he gave up his soul and the place was filled with a beautiful perfume.**

### **(Third) Rejoicing in Insults and Despising:**

As a person grows in his spiritual life as a whole, he also grows in every virtue. **Humility, like other virtues grows by striving and by practice.** Rejoicing in insults is not attained by a person in one step. At the beginning, when a person is insulted, he gets annoyed, or may be gets angry or furious. In the next step, when he is insulted, he gets annoyed but controls himself not to get angry. Next he goes up to a higher step and keeps his inner peace, and by striving he reaches a degree in which he rejoices in the insults. It is mentioned about the Apostles when they were beaten because they were preaching the Word of God "They departed rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41).

An even higher degree, is that the person not only rejoices in insults, but seeks them. It is said about a striving monk who was living in the desert, that he went to a monastery in Upper Egypt which was full of saintly fathers. After he stayed a few days in this monastery he went to the chief monk asking his permission to let him go. When the chief monk asked him for the reason, he answered "There is no toil here, all the fathers here are saints, **and I am a sinner, I wish to stay in a place where I meet insults and reproaches. A sinner is saved by insulting and despising**

**him**". The chief monk was surprised and permitted him to leave, telling him "Go and be strong". We should then be patient when insulted or despised, even should rejoice, knowing that they save us from vainglory, and increase our humility. For this reason, our teacher St. Paul said "**Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches**" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

#### **(Fourth) Avoid Boasting of Spiritual Gifts:**

This degree - in humility - even exceeds the latter degree. Obviously, a sick person feels his sickness, a poor person realises his poverty, and an offender knows about his offence. But it would be strange for a rich man to equate himself with the poor and the saint who - is honored by all - to count himself as the chief sinner!!

It is as if the saints, with what they acquired of gifts and graces, are saying what the twenty four priests are saying to Christ Who is sitting on His throne "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:11). Or in St. Paul's expression "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5), "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

The saints - as this is the case - feel that God is the source of every good thing, and that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). They felt that the secret of their lives and their continuous spiritual growth, is in Christ, as He said "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4). **Thus they related everything in them from spiritual gifts and graces to God.**

**The Lord Jesus Christ warned His disciples, when they returned with joy after the demons were subject to them, by saying "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:18, 20).**

We need a special divine help to keep in us the grace of humility while having spiritual gifts. St. Ambrose of Alexandria said "Nobody can keep and perfect this matter by himself, without a special very great grace". In this regards St. Paul says "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:12). Father John Cassian said "The human eyes, though healthy, cannot see without light. Likewise, a person, though a good one, cannot do good unless assisted by the light of grace". "Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalms 127:1).

#### **(Fifth) Practical Practices for Humility:**

**Such as dressing in simple humble dress, avoiding luxuries in clothing, food and**

**drink; doing jobs which nobody would like to do, submitting to our superiors and those who are older than us in age and position, in true love and humility, being quick to apologise to whom we did wrong, with sincere feeling and true humility, ... etc.**

These practices have great effect in acquiring true humility in two respects: **(a)** virtues are not attained except by work and **(b)** the fact that the outside behaviour affects the inside human feelings. The Lord Jesus Himself when He wanted to teach us humility, He did that in a practical way, as he bent down and washed the feet of His disciples; He also commanded them to do likewise.

**St. Basil the Great said** "Sciences and professions are not learned without practice. Who wishes to learn Philosophy, Literature, or one of the professions, needs to practice working at it in order to perfect it. Likewise, humility and other decent virtues cannot be perfected without practice". Also **St. Augustine said** "The inside and the outside of man are united one to the other, and each one is fond of the other to a great extent. So that when the body becomes humble and lowly, the heart gets inner feeling of humility. Hence if you bend down to kiss your brother's feet, the humility in your heart is moved or is strengthened if it already existed. External humility in front of the brethren, such as serving them and kissing their feet, simple dressing, and menial jobs, all these give birth to humility in the heart, and keeps and strengthens it, if it is already there.

#### **(Sixth) General Advice:**

**(a) Do not utter in front of others that which make them praise you,** even if what you say in its appearance shows humility, such as belittling or disdaining yourself. Some people do that - by words or deeds - in order to be praised by others.

**(b) If somebody praises you for some good deed, be quick and give thanks to God Who helped you in this deed and gave you grace in the eyes of others.** But if you start to experience the feeling of greatness, remember your sins which God hid so that others do not know about. Then you realise that you are not worthy of the praises of others.

**(c) Do not pretend to do a deed that others will observe and praise you for.** The Lord of Glory said "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them" (Matthew 6:1). Whatever you do, do it for God from Whom you expect the best reward.

**(d) Do not justify yourself for the wrongs you do.** The Psalmist said "Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies" (Psalm 141:4). **Do not give excuses for yourself like the people of the world do,** as Job said "If I have covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom" (Job 31:33). Be frank with yourself, honest in dealing with her and be quick to apologise to God and to others.

**(e) Esteem all other people better than yourself.** "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself"

(Philippians 2:3).

**(f) Do not choose the best places** or the front places. The Lord rebuked the Pharisees and the Scribes as "they love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues" (Matthew 23:6).

**(g) If you were in a gathering, do not be quick to speak before others, as if you were wiser or of better understanding than them.** If possible, be the last to speak, feeling that there are others who are better than you and have the right to speak before you. St. Pachomius said "Be humble in every thing, and if you know all the wisdom, be the last to speak".

**(i) Do not daydream with ambitious thoughts, even if they appear they are for the sake of the glory of God and the spread of His Kingdom.** Such as when somebody imagines that he became a bishop who oversees the matters of the Church diligently, and does great improvements. Beware of these thoughts, as the 'devil of pride' is hides behind them.

## F) ACQUIRING HUMILITY

### 1. Deeds of Repentance:

**Deeds of repentance in general help us in the life of humility. Humility - though the basis and supporter of all other virtues - itself feeds on and grows by the other virtues.** Hence St. John El-Dargy said "There are relations between these three: repentance, mourning and humility. First, the soul is ground by the striving of repentance, like wheat. Then it is kneaded with the water of weeping, the mourning water, like the dough. Then it is baked like bread with the fire of humility which is donated by God. Hence comes the salvation from the pains as the Prophet said "I was brought low, and He saved me" (Psalm 116:6) and also "Repentance raises the person, mourning knocks on the door of Heaven and the lowliness of thought opens the door of the Kingdom".

### 2. Feeling As A Stranger:

**St. John El-Dargy said "The feeling as a complete stranger realises humility".** A

person who feels as a stranger in this world does not care if he is not known by others, their cares or praises. The feeling of being a stranger creates in us the feeling of "death to the world", and this by itself is a big support to humility. A person who feels as a stranger, feels that he has no place in this world and asks diligently for the everlasting one, repeating the words of the Psalmist "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech" (Psalm 120:5). Moreover, the life of a stranger has its help from God. The Psalmist says "The Lord watches over the strangers" (Psalm 146:9). Our teacher St. Paul also says "God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:16).

### **3. Withstanding Difficulties with Patience:**

We mentioned earlier when we talked about the blessings of humility, that humility delivers and saves us from difficulties. We here add, **that withstanding difficulties with patience helps our humility to grow.** St. Isaac said "God holds tragedies and temptations to those who love good, in order for them to realise their weakness. Hence, difficulties create humility, maybe heart breaking through physical pain, by people's insults to them, or through poverty, sickness or need.

Some other times humility comes through defeat when the devil fights people with foul thoughts, that they may realise their weakness and become humble. In the past God spoke about His people saying "I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised **hearts are humbled**, and they accept their guilt" (Leviticus 26:41). St. Isaac also said "It is true Lord that You keep humiliating us with all kinds of temptations and troubles until our souls are humbled". He also said "**Through difficulties we come near to humility, and if one stays without sorrows** or temptations, he finds the door of haughtiness and pride opened in front of him"

### **4- Deprivation:**

The love of ownership in all of its shapes and forms, increases a person's tie to the world and binds him to it. Deprivation from this wrong deviated love, releases us from the bonds of the world, and makes us live with "liberated spirit". No doubt that **the deprivation from ownership creates in us the spiritual humility** which God praised and with which He initiated the Beatitudes on the mount saying "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). For this reason, the saintly fathers advised us to live the life of deprivation which leads us to humility. St. Isaac said "Who is controlled by the matters of this vanishing world, even by a part of it, cannot be humble or be of pure heart. Because the humble person is dead to the world, and the world is dead to him, and his heart would not tend to like any thing in it. So **if you want to be humble, first of all free yourself from the matters of the world**, and follow God with hope, faith and love, and you will obtain an everlasting life instead of the world which you have left"

## **G) YOUR LIFE IN LIGHT OF HUMILITY**

**We now view some spiritual practices in our lives in the light of this virtue.** We mean to show that the virtue should not remain just some theoretical knowledge, but becomes part of us, we acquire and live in it and by it. Obviously we could not view all practices in life, but we give examples to some, and you may use this as a measure for the other practices in your life.

### **1- In Praying:**

Often we feel conceited as a result of practising some spiritual activities. For example, a person who is regular in his prayers, may feel that he became a saintly person, just because he prays regularly. His feeling might be even stronger if God gave him for example the grace of shedding some tears when he prays. Praying thus becomes a subject for conceit, instead of for being a blessing for him. Do not be conceited in your prayers, as it cannot measure up to the prayers which God left for us as examples, when He used to pray all night long up on the mountain, or when He struggled in His prayers in Gethsemane at the beginning of His suffering. It also cannot measure up if compared to the prayers of those whose whole lives were prayers.

**Where are you, compared to St. Arsenius the Great,** who used to pray Saturday nights with his back to the setting sun, and stay like that all night long, in communion with God, until the sun rises in front of his eyes the next morning - and by that alone - he knows that the night ended and feels sad that the natural sun ended his communion with the Sun of Righteousness!! **Where are you compared to St. Bishoy who used to tie a rope to the hair of his beard, whose other end is tied to the ceiling of his room,** in order to overcome sleep and his physical nature.

**Where are you compared to the young saints Maximus and Domitius,** the son of a Byzantine Emperor, who despised the world with great courage? The prayers of one of them used to appear as a pillar of light which reached from his mouth to the sky, while fire used to go out of the mouth of the other, as was seen by St. Macarius the Great. **Where are you compared to St.**

**Tegi (St. Rowais)** who meditated for a period of 8 hours on the phrase "Our Father Who art in Heaven"?! , **or to Elijah the prophet** "he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain" (James 5:17, 18)??!

In its reality, prayers are not standing in front of God in certain periods of time, but it is a whole life by itself known as "Life of Prayer". For this David the Great said "But I give myself to prayer" (Psalm 109:4). The Lord asked us to pray earnestly, all the time, and "without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Are you like that in your prayer?

What about the prayers of faith and "the prayers with the spirit and with understanding" (1 Corinthians 14:15), and to "continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2), and the other elements of prayer which we should fulfil so that our prayers be acceptable.

Even so, if we completed all that, should we feel proud or gloat with our prayers? In that you are "An unprofitable servant" (Luke 17:10), even if you did what you are commanded. **You did not stand to pray until the Spirit of God moved you to do that.** Have you not read the words of St. Paul "The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26)? The mind of prayer with which you pray is not from yourself but from God, and the words of prayer are but the "Gift of Uttering", and that is all from Him, and the feeling of love is from Him also. **In total every thing is from Him because "from Him and by Him and to Him is every thing" (Colossians 1:20).**

Hence **when you stand to pray, feel poor and lowly, present your petition with feeling of lowliness. If we are accustomed to ask for something from a great person in this world, with meekness and lowliness,** should we not do like that when we ask the Father of the Spirits? This should be a beautiful experience for us to freshen our prayers. Before you start your prayer, keep quiet for a while, standing, kneeling, or worshipping under the feet of the Saviour. Think of how vile you are, and it is God's love which made you worthy to raise your voice and join the unseen heavenly hosts in their praises. If you did that you shall feel the comforts of God falling upon you in this prayer. **Nobody asks people for a donation if he is well dressed, else people refuse him. Likewise, when you ask God, do that in humility and lowliness, so that He be compassionate to you.**

## **2-In Fasting:**

Christianity in its greatness and spirituality did not impose praying and fasting on us, but it taught us that they are the secret of conquest and the key of victory, according to the teaching of Christ "This kind (the devil) can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). Hence when you fast do not feel that you are doing a deed which deserves a pay or an award from God. You do not fast for God's sake but for your own sake. It is to control your troublesome body, so that it would not betray you in front of the people. Your fasting is not for your spiritual strength but for the sake of your weakness. Depriving yourself from food for a long time should not make you feel

proud, but it is for straightening your devious self. Besides, fasting is performed in all religions - even the atheistic - and it has no value if it is not accompanied with spiritually and with fasting to sin.

**Moreover, your fasting could not be compared if measured to the fasting of the saints who overpowered their physical nature in an amazing way and scored high in fasting to get closer to God.** Where are you compared to the real fasting people. **Where are you compared to Moses who fasted forty days on the mountain, and from St. Bishoy** who used to fast every twenty days together?. Where are you compared to **St. Macarius of Alexandria** who, in the forty days of Lent, used to eat a leaf of boiled cabbage every Sunday, so as not to discourage the beginners in their monastic lives? And where are you compared to many saints who used to completely fast from food in the Holy Lent?!!

Even, if you completed all that, your fasting would not be acceptable unless you fast from sin, or as expressed by the Church in the Holy Fast "Let us fast from every evil, with purity and goodness".

### **3-In Giving Alms:**

What is your feeling when you give alms? When you present your tithes to God, do you feel that you did your duty which God commanded you, and that you paid His right?

**From the point of quantity,** know that giving the tithes is the lower limit in giving and it was particular for the Old Testament. But in the New Testament, the testament of grace and giving, we are asked to "Sell what we have and give alms" (Luke 12:33), and "Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Timothy 6:8), and "Be rich in good works ready to give" (1 Timothy 6:18), and to give cheerfully, "For God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

**From the point of how:** "Take heed that you do your charitable deeds, present your giving and alms with self denial, in order to take your complete reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1). Do not give alms for the sake of others to praise you, and "Do not sound a trumpet before you" (Matthew 6:2), so that people speak about your righteousness and mercy, else you had your reward (from them).

**Money from which you give alms is not yours, but is God's, and He did not give you this money to be rich for yourself (Luke 12:21), but to "Be rich in good deeds" (1 Timothy 6:18). "Naked you entered this world and also naked you shall leave it" (Job 1:21).**

After all, whatever you give, and be generous in your giving, you only give part of your money, while many others gave all they have, and with it gave themselves to the Lord. As an example, **St. Anthony**, the Father of Monasticism, who gave away all his wealth **and the two saints Babnoudah Al-Motarady and Botros the Worshipper**, who sold themselves and gave the price as alms.

The famous saint **Abraam** Bishop of Fayoum in Egypt, maker of miracles, was a living example for his mercies in his generation. Also the great, **Moalem Ibrahim El-Gohary**, was an example in his mercies. To the extent that some beggars, one day challenged each other as to who can provoke him with excessive asking for alms. In one morning, one of them took alms from him 18 times, and each time this beggar intended to let himself know that he was the same person who took alms a short while ago. Finally, this beggar cried out wondering to all the alms he took from him. The answer from Moalem Ibrahim was "Whatever money I have is but a safekeeping given to me by Christ, and I do not deny it when He asks for it?". He loved giving alms so much to the extent that after he died, he appeared in a dream to a needy man asking him to go to a certain person and take an amount of money, Moalem Ibrahim lent this person before he died. This actually happened.

## **H) HUMILITY AND SOME OTHER VIRTUES**

### **DOES HUMILITY CONTRADICT BEING OF GOOD REPUTATION?**

Is there contradiction between being humble and of what a person should attain from good reputation?

No contradiction exists. As mentioned before, humility does not mean putting on old clothes, relating some bad deeds or faulty behaviours to one's self. Humility is a life we live within ourselves, which takes some external appearances, not intended to be seen by others, but initiated by inner thoughts. Without doubt, we are all asked to be examples in every thing including humility. Naturally, we try to present our humility as example to others, otherwise it is not humility!

**Hence, enjoying good report is not in conflict with being humble, provided that one does not work to attain this good reputation.** We are asked to enjoy a good reputation and also be humble as each is a divine command. Our teacher St. Paul said "Avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us, providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians 8:20, 21). He also said "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-- meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:8), and also said "We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God" (2 Corinthians 6:3, 4). St. Peter said "Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12). The Lord Jesus said before all of those "That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

If we were absolutely obliged - as ministers for example - to speak about some of our toil in the service for example, we may do so provided that we give the glory to God. This is what St. Paul did in his epistle to the church of Corinth, when he defended his Apostolic authority, for the sake of the service.

When St. Paul was obliged to speak about his toil and labour in serving the Word, he said "I laboured more abundantly than they all". Then he continued by saying "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me", and at the same time said "I am not worthy to be called apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9, 10). He also said in his second epistle to the Corinthians **"If so, I also may boast a little, I boast in my weaknesses. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 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 Corinthians 11:16-33, 12:9, 10).

## **DOES HUMILITY OPPOSE THE SPIRIT OF ADVANCEMENT?**

We previously mentioned that "death to the world" and "deprivation" feed humility and strengthen it, and that is obvious. Who died to the world, does not fear anything, and he who deprived himself from the love of worldly desires and possessions, does not subject himself to anything. In this regards, St. Augustine said his famous saying "I sat on the top of the world when I felt that I desire nothing and fear nothing". Thus humility would be an important factor in strengthening the spirit of courage and advancement.

The person who denies himself so that God appears in him and by him, has his sign "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). If Christ is alive in me, would I fear anything?, or would I be a coward? **The secret of our humility is our realisation of our weakness, and the secret of our courage is from He Who said "For My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Thus by our humility we lean on the strength of the Saviour.**

Solomon said in his Songs "Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" (Songs 8:5). This verse explains an important principle; that in all our deeds we lean on our Saviour. St. Paul said "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, **yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me**" (1 Corinthians 15:10). The last part of this verse "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" is the leaning on the beloved. He also said "I can do all things **through Christ who strengthens me**" (Philippians 4:13). Again the last part of this verse "Through Christ who strengthens me" is the leaning on the beloved. Leaning on the arm of the Lord Jesus gives courage and strength. **For this, Isaiah said "But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).**

**A humble person trains himself for all conditions and circumstances.** He knows how to keep quiet when he should keep quiet, speaks up when it is needed, and takes up leadership when it

is necessary. St. Paul said "For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:11, 12). He also said "By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed" (2 Corinthians 6:8, 9).