

CHAPTER 5

PRIDE

"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"

(James 4:6)

- A) Reality of pride and its essence**
- B) What does pride do?**
- C) Causes which lead to pride**
- D) One's pride in front of himself**
- E) Some features of pride**
- F) Pride concealed within virtue**
- G) How does one deal with his own pride?**

A) REALITY OF PRIDE AND ITS ESSENCE

VAST AREAS FOR THE WAR AGAINST PRIDE:

Do not think, dear brother, when we write to you about 'pride', that this subject does not concern you. Read this subject well until you discover yourself in its light. Then strive to get rid of the sin of which the Wise Jesus Ben Sirach said "The origin of sin is pride, so persistence in it brings on a deluge of depravity" (Sirach 10:12, 13).

In short, pride is realised when one blasphemes, speaks too much about himself, relates good deeds to himself, or feels that he is counted among the saints. If this is not the case for us, it does not mean that we are free from this chronic illness. This illness might be in your body and you do not feel it. It resembles a malignant disease, which has no symptoms in the beginning.

Father John Cassian said "The 'devil of inflated ego and vain praises' inflicts acute pain. Because the pain is acute, it is not quickly controlled, and its beginning and aim can not be discerned. Other pains are apparent, clear, and are immediately felt. Thus it is simple and easy to fight them if one is diligent in striving against them. **But the fight against the inflated ego and vain praises is hard and difficult because it is a fight against every shape and form and extends to every matter of life: in walking, speaking, eating, in keeping quiet and in keeping awake, in fasting, praying, even in reading and in singing praises, in long-suffering and in patience.** This devil does not keep quiet, but directs his arrows towards every one who lives in virtue, hoping to deny him the reward of his striving. If not in the beauty and quality of clothes, he catches him in the poor and old clothes. If he does not get him through dignity, he gets him through enduring indignity and poverty. If he does not hit him with good talk, logic and proofs, he tries to hit him with calmness and quietness. If he does not satisfy him with more food, he seeks to praise him for his fasting. In short, he stands in the way of every striving person in every deed and in every arrangement, whether for the body or for the soul, in order to trip him and spoil it for him. If he does not hit him with the left hand, he does that with the right hand".

If you were walking in the road of virtue, do not count that this will immunize you from this illness. Getting ill from it happens to those walking in the road of virtue and to those striving in the life of the spirit, more than it happens to others. Or as expressed by St. John El-Dargy, the head monk of Tour Sinai monasteries "The 'devil of hopelessness' rejoices in increasing sins, and the 'devil of inflation and vain praises' rejoices in increasing virtues".

Father John Cassian also says "The 'devil of greatness' is a wicked spirit, does not attack except those who matured in the spiritual stature in order to destroy the tower of their virtues. All pains are killed in their beginnings, except this wicked pain as it attacks at the end. For this reason, its hurt is great and its harm is immense. It is known that the desire of the stomach is controlled by fasting, sexual immorality by purity, the love of wealth by deprivation and poverty, and anger by modesty. But the wickedness of pride, if it takes hold of a miserable soul, it is like the revenging commander, when he surrounds and conquers a great city, destroys it to its foundation".

Pride is like a thief who in the dark keeps going unseen to the inner room, misleads his prey, and catches her while asleep, or like the killer who deceives his enemy and kills him, or like the spy who works for the enemy. Duty implies that we know its means, uncover its ways and deliver it to the King of our lives, in order not to be counted as betrayers of Whom we really belong to. He should dominate our minds, hearts and bodies, and even on all our lives.

Pride is a serious illness which needs great examination and excessive alertness. Or as expressed by the fathers, it requires discernment, in order to understand it and labour to get rid of.

If you wish to initially know yourself, and look for her safety before studying this subject, answer these simple questions:

Do you feel pleased when somebody praises you, and feel annoyed with those who rebuke or scorn you, or at least feel uncomfortable with them or with what they say? Do you shout and get angry as the rebuking and the directing increase?

What is the extent of your obedience?

What is the extent of your acceptance of the advice, directions and instructions of others?

What are your feelings towards people whom you surpass in education, wisdom, virtue and wealth? Are they feelings of kindness compassion and pity, combined with feelings of thankfulness, gratitude and praise to God Who granted you all these graces, and beatified you with these virtues, or are they feelings of flourishing and adornment because you are better than them?

Perhaps now, your estimation of yourself started to change in the light of these few words. Then follow with care the subject of this serious sin.

REALITY OF PRIDE

1 - Without doubt, it is the greatest of all sins and the most dangerous. The teacher Origen said in his book "The Principles": "One might ask which sin is the greatest. It is obviously believed that the greatest sin is adultery, impurity, or any other defilement resulting from desire. It is true that these sins are ugly and terrible, but they are not like that sin which the Holy Bible denounces and counts as the greatest of all sins. We ought to be aware of it. Hence, which is the greatest sin? Without doubt, it is the one which caused the downfall of the devil. And what is this sin which echoes such greatest? Pride, arrogance and exaltation. It is the devil's sin. Because of it he fell from heaven to earth as "God resists the proud" (James 4:6).

2 - It gives birth to many sins. It is not a sin by itself, such as stealing or lying, but it is a mother which gives birth to sons for the devil. St. John El-Dargy said "I have bound this wicked (pride) with the ties of obedience, and flogged her with the whip of contempt, so that she tells me about herself. She said: "**I am the head and mother of all pains**, nothing bosses me, and nothing opposes me except humility and obedience. **My children are anger, rivalry, condemnation,**

shouting, arguing, blasphemy, and the convincing of one's self by his own opinion. Vain praises is my wagon, but modesty and blaming of one's self laughs at the wagon and the rider, and sing saying : We sing to the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea" (Exodus 15:1) of humility.

3 - It is a tower in which many sins barricade themselves. This becomes clear from the above saying of St. John El-Dargy. The proud person for example does not confess his sins else people say that he made a mistake. He does not apologise, else they say that he is weak. He does not obey others, else they understood that he has a weak personality, and that his opinion is inferior to others'. Again, he can not be modest and peaceful, else people think he is weak. He wants to be angry so that others know that he stands for his rights. He usually speaks nonstop so as not to be accused of ignorance or cowardice.

4 - Pride is a stubborn enemy, it continues to fight us until the last breath of our lives. It does not follow particular circumstances in the life of a person. The wars of desire intensify for example during the ages of youth, and decline or weaken after that. But pride does not weaken at all. It caused many saints to fall after they reached the highest degrees of monasticism!! It is said about St. Macarius the great, that when his soul was leaving his body, the 'devil of vainglory' came and kept praising him hoping to trap him. The devil said to him "Blessed are you Macarius because you reached your destination". The saint replied "I have not arrived yet". The devil kept fighting him until his soul arrived in heaven. Then the saint said "Now by the grace of Christ I arrived". It is also true what St. John El-Dargy said in this respect "**Keep guard from this thief (vain praises) which does not leave you until death**".

5 - It is a truly strange sin as it conceals itself within the virtue and it is not easy to distinguish it. After a striver overcomes and conquers a lot of sins, the 'devil of vain praises' comes to him. St. John El-Dargy says some wonderful words in this meaning "**If I fast, I like fasting, and if I do not fast in order to hide my virtue, I admire my wisdom. If I put on new clothes, I like my outfit, and if I put on old clothes, I admire being ascetic. The same if I keep quiet or I speak, if praised or if insulted and was patient. It is like the thistles, whichever way it is thrown to the ground, it is upright.**

6 - It is strange that other sins dare not appear in the open in front of the people. But pride appears clearly everywhere, even in churches and places of worship. Adulterers, killers, and thieves for example, shy away and are afraid if their deeds are known. But proud people do not care, because they do not realise their errors and weaknesses, and they always like "the first places" and to be first in every matter.

7 - More than that, all sinners like the company of their kind, except the proud. The drunkard, adulterer, and the thief are glad to be with their kind. **But the proud does not like anybody to share his vainglory,** and always likes to be the only one honored, praised and beloved. No two proud people can share a dwelling together. **Hence, the proud is deprived from good relations with the rest of the people.** On the contrary, a person who denies himself has good ties with others. In the past Jesus Ben Sirach said "**Arrogance is hateful to God and man**" (Sirach 10:7).

THE ORIGIN OF SIN:

Jesus Ben Sirach said "**The origin of pride is to forsake the Lord**, man's heart revolting against his Maker" (Sirach 10:12). The relation of a man to God is like the relation of a child to his father. A child always needs his father, and cannot live without his care and shepherding. Man's forsaking God indicates that he is not in need of God. If a believer feels that God gives him life, soul and everything, as by Him we live, move and exist (Acts 17:25, 18), then how can he allow himself to be far from God? Is this not considered pride?!

Moreover, getting closer to God shows love, and keeping away from God indicates dislike. How do man dislike and hate God? Does not he fear Him? Abandoning God confirms that he does not love nor fear Him. What do we call that? This is nothing but pride.

Ben Sirach said in this context "**The origin of sin is pride**" (Sirach 10:12). How does this happen?

* The origin of sin is pride, as it is the first sin which entered the world by the envy of the devil, and made our first parents Adam and Eve fall.

* The origin of sin, meaning the chief one: Pride as we saw, is one of the greatest sins, a mother, or even the worst sin.

* The origin of sin, meaning the first sin: Attaining virtue is either by fearing God or by loving Him. Either means keeps me from sin. A person who fears God is careful not to disobey Him, and those who love Him keep His commandments. Hence if I do not keep His commandment for fear or for love, I am a proud person who challenges God, forgetting His words in the past to Saul "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5). What the Spirit said to the angel of the Church of the Laodicean confirms this meaning "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. **Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing**" (Revelation 3:16, 17). What do these words indicate: "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"? They indicate the pride of the soul.

Thus pride has another meaning in the eyes of God, other than what many understand. It is not only haughtiness, greatness and the love of praise, but includes many other meanings, summarised by the words of Ben Sirach: "Is to forsake God".

Beware then my brother, else by being lukewarm in your spiritual life, or forsaking your Creator, you show yourself proud in front of Him, not needing Him, while "you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17).

B) WHAT DOES PRIDE DO?

If the sin of pride is so hated by God, it is because the proud person resembles a daring and a rude thief, to the extent that his recklessness made him steal God Himself. He steals the glory, honor and greatness which are only due to His Holy Majesty. God is very jealous for His glory and says in the tongue of Isaiah "I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8). He said that again "I will not give My glory to another" (Isaiah 48:11). St. Paul also said "To God who alone is wise, **be honor and glory** forever and ever" (1 Timothy 1:17). St. Augustine said "Lord, a person who wants praise for the good which is from Your gifts, and does not aim for Your glory in the good he does, but to the glory of himself, he is but a thief and robber, like the devil who tried to steal Your glory".

No wonder then, that God hates this sin more than all the other sins. If He hates evil in general because it is against His good nature, He has a special attitude towards this sin which is like a fortress in which many sins fortify. St. James explained this matter by saying "**God resists the proud**, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). This verse shows the extent of God's hate to the proud. It is not sufficient that He shows His hate to their sin, but also declares that He resists them. As this is the case, pride has very bad consequences:

1. A proud person - because of his pride - Divine Grace departs from him, and he falls into the worst sins. The fathers said "The proud by knowledge falls into the sin of blasphemy, and the proud by asceticism falls into the sin of adultery". The church history keeps for us the names of the chief blasphemers, such as Arius the priest who was great in knowledge and philosophy, Macedonios and Nestor who each was a Patriarch on the See of Constantinople, and Otachi who was the head of a monastery in the vicinity of Constantinople. The history of the ascetic people keeps the names of some saints who fell in the sin of adultery, among them were some hermits. It is known that being a hermit is the highest spiritual stage. Many of those fell because of their pride, and also for their chastising.

2. The proud person does not only exalt himself over people but also despises the word of God Himself. "When Jeremiah had stopped speaking to all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, all these words, that Azariah the son of Hoshaiiah, Johanan the son of Kareah, and all **the proud** men spoke, saying to Jeremiah, "You speak falsely!" (Jeremiah 43:1, 2).

3. Pride empties the heart from mercy, kindness and compassion. It covers the ears from hearing the cries of the poor, closes the eyes so as not to see their misery, and hardens the heart so as not to be kind to them. The Psalmist said "The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor" (Psalm 10:2).

4. It causes strife between people, ignites and stirs it. The Wise said "By pride comes nothing but strife" (Proverbs 13:10), and also said "He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife" (Proverbs 28:25).

5. A person by pride, wants to be great and big, but what he reaps is contrary to that. As God resists him - as was previously said - he will never succeed. The Lord of Glory said "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled" (Luke 14:11). The reason is that **the proud "exalts himself", not God. Since it is he who exalts himself, his exaltation does not stay, and soon falls down.** "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:52), and the Wise said "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor" (Proverbs 29:23).

6. God does not dwell in the proud heart, but abandons it and it becomes desolate. The Lord Jesus said to the inhabitants of Jerusalem after they rejected Him "See! Your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:38). The Psalmist said "For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, you shall despise their image" (Psalm 73:3, 19, 20). The Wise said "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18), and also said "Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility" (Proverbs 18:12).

7. If a man perfected all the virtues, but presents them to God mixed with haughtiness and pride, they are rejected from Him the Almighty. They are like frankincense mixed with dust and dirt. When put in the burning coal, soon, there comes out a bad smell which repels the nose and aggravates the eye.

PRIDE AND THE FALL OF MIGHTY MEN

We saw how God very much hates the sin of pride, and no wonder that He resists the proud, abases their exaltation, and casts a horrible ending to their might, to make them lessons to others.

David the prophet said "For You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks" (Psalm 18:27). The Wise Ben Sirach said "The Lord overturns the thrones of princes and enthrones the gentle in their place. The Lord pulls up nations by the roots and plants the humble instead" (Sirach 10:14, 15). God said on the tongue of Isaiah "Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible" (Isaiah 13:9, 11).

God was able to humiliate the mighty Pharaoh by severe natural disasters, by large animals, or dangerous beasts. But instead, He sent him frogs, lice and flies, such small amphibians and tiny

insects, so that Pharaoh knows his own worth (Exodus 8). In the same way, the Lord dealt with Peter His disciple, as He abased Peter's pride in front of a slave (Matthew 26). Also mighty Goliath who was so proud, disgracing the armies of the living God, God humiliated him through a young boy, a shepherd, David, with no weapon, but fortified by the power of the Lord of hosts, which he deserved because of his meek spirit, which cried continually saying "I was brought low, and He saved me" (Psalm 116:6).

We present in this context, two examples from the Holy Bible:

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylonia who thought it was he who established his kingdom, boasting proudly. God took the kingdom from him, drove him from men, his dwelling was with the beasts of the field, made him eat grass like oxen and his body was wet with the dew of heaven (Daniel 4:31-33). And at the end of the time which God allowed for his chastisement for the pride of his soul, his understanding returned to him and he blessed the Lord saying "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. **And those who walk in pride He is able to abase**" (Daniel 4:27-37).

Herod the mighty and powerful king, the angel of the Lord struck him, after he inflated himself with exaltation, hearing the divine features related to him and "Did not give glory to God" (Acts 12:20-23). And he was eaten by worms and died.

C) CAUSES WHICH LEAD TO PRIDE

Is a person during his life subjected to situations which lead him to pride?

Yes, there are causes. But this does not mean that these causes definitely lead to pride. What happens is that the devil uses these situations as weapons with which he fights man. We may summarize these causes in the following:

1. Personal Causes:

Such as beauty, intelligence, bodily strength and health, etc. It is strange when such gifts become causes for pride to enter our selves. They are intrinsic gifts which God offered us, and we have no input in having them. But we take these gifts and make them subject for His contempt!! While often these matters become subject for our glory, St. Paul says "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). He also says "If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity" (2 Corinthians 11:30).

Dear brother, do you have any input for having good looks, bodily strength or an intelligent mind?! These graces were born with you, and for what results from them from worldly prosperity

or material success, we should thank God, Who granted them to us. And if you have a beloved and attractive personality, that people love and feel comfortable with, do not be deceived, thinking that this comes from your cute thinking, your rare intelligence, your excessive activities and your knowledge of the psychology of the masses. Be sure that this is also owing to God Who gave you grace in the eyes of the people.

Moreover, you cannot be sure of keeping these graces and gifts which are the subject for your haughtiness. This beauty may be marred or diminished due to illness or a certain accident. One may also lose his intelligence with which he glories. The evidence of what we say, is the presence of some great scientists as inmates in mental hospitals. You could not distinguish between them and the street person who suffers from their illnesses in regards to their mental cases. The concern about general health and the safety of body members and senses, is obvious. How many diseases there are which have attacked strong and healthy people, and made them, in no time weak and frail.

Then assume that all these divine gifts stayed with you until the end of this worldly life - all these worldly decorations - will they benefit you in front of the just pulpit of Christ in the last day?, when you stand up stripped from anything which may help you. The reward will be according to the inner state of your heart, without any external attributes.

2. Worldly Causes:

Such as riches, position, wealth, influence, etc.

These are green pastures for the 'devil of pride', and fertile soil which produces for him abundant crops in the world of darkness. They are also like a far away arena to which he attracts his preys where he satisfies their conceit, while he prepares to get them. Our teacher St. Paul said "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For **the love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. **But you, O man of God, flee these things**" (1 Timothy 6:9-11). The Lord also said on the tongue of Ezekiel the prophet "**You have increased your riches and your heart is lifted up because of your riches**" (Ezekiel 28:5).

Did such people who are misled with much riches, positions, wealth or influence, know that God is the source of all of these, and that He alone gives the strength to get and collect them? Hannah the mother of Samuel the prophet said "The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes" (1 Samuel 2:7, 8). The Divine Inspiration also said "You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). Again how beautiful is the song of the meek Virgin in the ears of her relative Elizabeth "He 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).

How nice to be rich for God, and to be rich in good works. This was the advice of St.

Paul for his disciple Timothy "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works" (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

It is not certain that one can keep such material riches, as material things, are subject to world events and changes. One of the best examples the Bible mentioned, was about Job. It is said about him "This man was the greatest of all the people of the East" (Job 1:3). This Job had lost all his wealth, his sons, his daughters and all his servants, all together. So the Wise said "**For riches are not forever**" (Proverbs 27:24). **And even though you made sure to keep it in this world, you would not be able to take any of it in the life to come.** Perhaps people value you, respect and hold you in high regard for your riches, or for your social position, but it will be different in the next life. There, you will be naked and stripped, like all creatures. How true what Job said "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" (Job 21:1). Also the rich man, at whose gate Lazarus full of sores was laid, his wealth did not help him in the other world. Father Abraham said to him "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented" (Luke 16:19-25).

Hence, do not put your heart on collecting wealth, for the sake of collecting it, thinking that it will benefit you, strengthen, or earn you fear and respect. But beware to discover the "Hidden treasure" and possess "The one pearl of great price". Possess Christ and you have the world and all there in as the Apostle says "As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10). Ask yourself frankly, to where your treasure is, as the Lord Jesus said "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34).

3. Pious Causes:

We said that what makes the sin of pride more dangerous, is that it conceals itself within the virtue. No wonder that pious matters may be causes for pride. As **examples of pious causes, possessing of some spiritual virtues, or some special gifts, such as the gift of teaching, preaching, or having a beautiful voice for chanting or for proclamations, etc.**

Wicked are all our pious practices, and rejected by God, if they are mixed with exaltation, pride and self-righteousness. God wants the broken heart, about which David said in the spirit "A broken and a contrite heart-- these, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17). The pharisee leaning on his self-righteousness, had prayers, fasting, alms and other virtues which he kept counting in his prayer to God in the temple. But these were all rejected, because he presented them with an exalted heart and haughty soul (Luke 18:9 -14).

We owe all our lives to God, both physical and spiritual lives. He alone cares for our bodies and nurtures our spirits. Yet in us (that is, in our flesh) nothing good dwells (Romans 7:18). How much we offend God with our exaltation and conceit, we who are dishonored (1 Corinthians 4:10)!!

You did not come to know God by yourself, but it is He Who proclaimed Himself to you. You did not call Him, but He called you. He renewed your life and purified your thoughts. He

separated you from the world to be His, and He chose you in Him before the foundation of the world, that you should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians 1:4). He prepared a kingdom for you to inherit from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34). Do you realise that without His grace upon you, you would have drowned deep in sin and in filth?

If you have pure thoughts, the excellence is not of you, but of God who granted you these thoughts. As a whole if you are feeling some power in your spiritual life, read what our teacher St. Paul says "For it is the God Who commanded light to shine out of darkness, Who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:6,7).

Whatever you have of goodness is from God, and whatever you have of evil is from you yourself. The shining moon you see, known for its beauty, is by itself a dark body, with no light in it. But its light comes from the light of the sun. Is it proper for the moon to boast over the sun? What happens if the sun hides its light from the moon? Jesus is the sun of righteousness and He is "The light of the world" (John 8:12) and He called us "The light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). We are enlightened so that we shine. What if He hides His light and concealed His shine from us? Immediately we become darkness.

We are branches in the true vine, and the life of the branch depends on the sap of life reaching it from the origin. What if the sap stopped travelling to the branch? No doubt, it would soon wither and fall down. Rivers do not flow by themselves, but from their sources. The rivers of living water which overflow in the bellies of the faithful (John 7:38) come from God by the power of the Holy Spirit. What then if God does not feed these rivers? Would not their flow stop and their water dry out? Did you not read, dear brother, that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17)?, as well as the saying of the philosopher of Christianity St. Paul "If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise" (1 Corinthians 3:18)!!

It is worthy, dear brother, to thank God from all your heart -for these spiritual gifts - so that He keeps them for you and increases them. "There is no gift without abundance, except that which lacks thanksgiving". Thank Him from all your heart, realising your weakness, because all that you have of goodness is from Him the Almighty. Sing in your heart the everlasting song which St. Gregory the Theologian sang by the Holy Spirit, in his Liturgy addressing God the Son "**You granted me the gift of speech. You gave me the learning of Your knowledge. You have bound me to all the remedies that lead to life. You blessed my nature in You. And fulfilled Your Law on my behalf. You have shown me the rising from my fall**".

St. Paul the Apostle who had spiritual gifts, and saw visions and revelations said about himself "It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 12:1). When he wanted to give the Christians an idea of what he saw in the third heaven to which he was caught up, he did not speak about himself as the person to whom these revelations were revealed, he spoke with exquisite self-denial saying "I know a man in Christ -- such a one was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). He continued by saying "Yet of myself I will not boast, except

in my infirmities" (2 Corinthians 12:5). In the same place he also said "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10).

Have you seen, dear brother, what this great Apostle who saw visions and revelations said? How he denied himself? He boasted in his infirmities so that the power of Christ rests upon him!! How much should we imitate him so that the power of Christ rests upon us and we become worthy of more and higher gifts.

4. Social Causes:

Such as the praises of others, their admiration, excessive honor and respect they give us.

These are powerful nets which the enemy lays in the way of the labourer to catch their souls. St. John El-Dargy said "**Great is he who refuses the praises of people, and greater is he who refuses the praises of the devils**". By accepting praises, we fall into the sin of vain praises, which leads us to pride.

You may say, defending yourself, I do not think much about myself, and I cannot stop people from admiring and praising me, with what it brings from behaviour of honor and respect. On the other hand, this is life. You praise a giver in order to encourage him to give more.

I agree with you. You cannot control the feelings of others towards you, but you can control your own feelings. What are your feelings when you listen to the praises of others and their admiration of you? Do you get inner joy accompanied with pleasure in what you hear? Do praising phrases have special resonance in your ears and echo in yourself which make you love those who praise you, even if you say that you are poor, a sinner, nothing, and it is God who works in you?!!

The matter may not stop here, but may develop to an extent where a person sometimes asks for the opinion of others about a deed or a service he did, under the cover that he would like to avoid any mistakes or shortcomings in what he did. Again when he hears the phrases of praise, he is pleased. Yet he utters intense words expressing his humility and poverty in the spirit. Remember dear brother, that is the 'devil of vain praises' himself moving you or at least making use of these situations. Beware and realise that the tares of pride started to sprout in your heart.

In order to know the importance of such praises, as a tool in the hands of the devil to make you fall, hear the words of an experienced person. St. John El-Dargy said "I wondered about the devil as I saw him sow some thoughts in a brother, then he went to another brother, reported these thoughts and warned him from them, in order to praise him as a good person who knows the unknown, so that the brother feel exalted". In other words - because the devil uses this weapon, as a two sided weapon - he does not wait for others to praise us and then uses the praises to enter pride into ourselves. He rather fabricates the causes, and push others to direct the praises to us, in order to fulfil his wicked purpose.

For this reason, the saintly fathers were very aware of this matter, that they said "Whoever praises his brother lays down nets for his feet". In explaining that, they said "Do not praise some body to his face, else conceit may enter him, and do not praise him in his absence, in order not to excite the envy of the devil towards him". To that extent, our fathers were aware of the 'devil of vain praises'.

Let us now escape from that and be like the dead to the world which "is passing away, and the lust of it" (1 John 2:17). Do not care for people's praises nor for their scorn. Do not be pleased if they praise you and do not get angry if they scorn you. Their praises or scorn change nothing in your life. They may only cause you some hurt. Yet enduring offences, insults and despises, save us from vainglory. For this reason the saints hastened and entered from the narrow door, and endured the difficult road. St. Isaac said "If you do not meet an offence in any day, do not count it a day in your life".

After all, who are you to accept praises and glory from others? Your Master and Teacher says "I do not receive honor from men" (John 5:41). If He, the Holy and without vile, the perfect who knew no sin, said that, what do I say, knowing that "I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother bear me" (Psalm 51:5).

Do you not know that people admire you and praise your deeds and life, because they only see in you your good side? But your bad deeds, your sins, your scandals and weaknesses, they do not see. That is because God hid them away from them, because He loves you and has mercy upon you. For this reason we thank Him in the beginning of "the prayer of thanksgiving" saying "Let us give thanks to the beneficent, ..., for He has covered us". This reason for which we thank Him comes before other reasons "supported us, preserved us, accepted us unto Him, had compassion on us, sustained us, and brought us to this hour". If this is the case, dear brother, why do you forget yourself and accept praises from others?!!

5. Devilish Causes:

These result from the wars of the devil to make us fall. We mentioned that the 'devil of pride' fights us via virtue, hides in it or puts on its robe. Somebody might have laboured against many sins and conquered them. The 'devil of pride' comes to him - in his spiritual struggle - not making war, but praising him for his striving, exalting his endurance and sacrifices, so as to deprive him from all the fruits of his previous labour. The saintly Fathers were very careful to expel this dangerous enemy with the other enemies. It was mentioned about one father that the devil appeared to him in the shape of an angel of light and said to him "I am Gabriel, sent to you". The father answered him immediately "Perhaps you were sent to someone else, as I am a sinner". It was mentioned about another father who used to see demons in person, and saw the devil defeated from him. One day the devil appeared to him as a figure of light, saying "I am Christ". The saint closed his eyes. The devil asked him "I am Christ and you close your eyes from me". The saint answered "I do not want to see Christ here".

In both stories, the 'devil of pride' could not stand the humility of the saint, or his discernment, and disappeared at once.

6. Relative Cause:

Pride may also be caused by comparing one's self with others who are less than him.

This is a serious weapon with which the enemy keeps attacking us, until we give up and stop striving, satisfied with what we have achieved in our spiritual life, or spiritual knowledge. We ask you dear brother, why do you measure yourself with those who are less than you in holiness, righteousness, virtue, knowledge, ... etc? Why do you compare yourself with evil and ignorant people, and not with the saints and the learned? This comparison not only diminishes your ambition, but also weakens your striving and limits your activities.

God asks us to be perfect and holy, not as an advice but as an order as He says "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48) and "As He Who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15). We surely know that without holiness, no one can see God (Hebrews 12:14), that "The righteous one is scarcely saved" (1 Peter 4:18), and that the life of lukewarmness and carelessness is hated by God. "So then, because you are lukewarm, ..., I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:16). Why then do we cease striving, and be content with what we have of weakness and lukewarm, thinking proudly that we are better than others, and "thanks be to God"?!!

Put in front of you the personalities of the great saints, the preaching apostles, the striving martyrs, and the ascetic worshippers, such as apostles Paul and Mark, St. George and St. Mena the martyrs, Demiana and Barbara the martyrs, Paula, Anthony, Macarius, Arsenius, Pachomius, and Shenouda the ascetic monks. If one puts these saints in front of him, sees their holiness, love and asceticism, his heart will be filled with zeal and holy love. His own self will appear small in his eyes, and he will cry in modesty saying "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where shall I, a sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18).

D) ONE'S PRIDE IN FRONT OF HIMSELF

In the previous section we presented some of the causes which lead to pride. Pride may exist in the heart of a person, while he has an outward pious appearance. Or it may appear on the outside of one's life. In this section, **we speak about the inner pride of the heart.**

We are in need of the grace of discernment about which St. Anthony, the father of all

monks, said it is superior to all the virtues. It is like the light of the body which enlightens all of it. However, the saints said that the grace of discernment is not attained except by humility. Let us be humble under His high hand, so that He elevates our faces to Him and shows us the reality of our selves. Let us also turn to our spiritual guiding fathers who give us the right advice, by the command of the Spirit of God Whom they follow. There are some points with which we may know ourselves in their light. Be candid with yourself and answer the following questions frankly, in order to be aware of the reality of yourself.

*** Do you feel in your heart that without God, you are but darkness, void, nothing, and all you have of worth and goodness is from Him?**

*** What is your feeling when you stand in front of God to pray,** whether you are alone, with others in a prayer meeting, or in a general prayer? Do you feel you are not worthy to stand in front of God, like "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 18:13)?

*** If you were among those who serve in the church,** do you feel that you give or that you take? Do you feel that you sacrifice your time and effort for the service of God, or that you thank God Who permitted you to carry His word and His teachings to others, and serve the cause of reconciliation? That somebody like you should not teach but rather should be taught, and that you sat on the chair of the teacher at the time you should sit beneath the feet to be taught?

*** What is your feeling when you fast?** Do you get the feeling of exaltation, or comfort in the heart that you fast without food to a late hour of the day, or you think that you fast because you are in need of fasting with which you control your troublesome body, not to make you a laughing stock in front of the people? That your fasting is not for your spiritual strength but for your weakness, and that refraining from food to a late hour, is not a subject for exaltation, but a means for straightening yourself, which is deviating more than the rest of the people? And that your fasting cannot measure up to the fasting of others who truly fast, ..., and what about fasting to sin, and the like?. Do you do that?

*** What is your feeling when you give alms?** From your offering, do you give your tithes to God, and do you feel that you did your duty which God commanded you, and satisfied His rights? From the point of the cause, do you give your offering, for the people in order that they praise you, and speak about you with gratitude? That "you sound a trumpet before you, ..., that you may have glory from men", or that "when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matthew 6:1-4).

*** From the point of quantity:** Do you know that your tithes are the lowest limit in giving, and it was particular for the Old Testament? But that Christ in the Testament of Grace, has taught us to "Sell what you have and give alms" (Luke 12:33). That is to sell what we have "Food and clothing, with these we shall be content. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:8, 7). The Apostle also asked us to be generous in our giving: "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap

bountifully, ..., for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever" (2 Corinthians 9:6-9).

Also this wealth from which you give alms is not yours, but God's "from whom, by whom and to whom all things are", and He gave it to you. You do not possess anything in this world, because naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there (Job 21:1).

And where are your alms and offerings beside the offerings of those who not only gave all their wealth but also gave themselves to God, and lived destitute, afflicted, and wandering about in the deserts, on the hills, in caves and cracks of the earth. Those to whom the Divine Inspiration witnessed by saying "Of whom the world was not worthy" (Hebrews 11:37, 38).

As a whole, keep account of yourself, examine the movements of your heart and inner feelings, and pull out the plant of pride from its roots, so that the plant of virtue grows and produces many fruits. Jesus Ben Sirach said "Never be roused by violent passions; they will tear you apart like a bull, they will eat up your leaves, destroy your fruit, and leave you a withered tree" (Sirach 6:2, 3).

E) SOME FEATURES OF PRIDE

We mentioned in the previous section, that the heart of a man might waver with feelings of greatness, entailing haughty thoughts. Yet he appears from the outside as a meek person. **But it happens sometimes, that the effect of pride reflects on his outer behaviour,** such as the way one walks, the excessive care of dressing smartly, the high voice, and talking to others in the form of orders, ..., etc.

Before discussing this matter, we wish to attract the attention to three points:

First: We should not judge others according to their outside appearances. This is utterly wrong. The Lord Jesus warned us against that by saying "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

Second: The devil might take advantage of the way a person talks, to pull us to the sin of

condemnation which is the daughter of pride.

Third: When we say that pride might take an outside appearance, **it is not necessary that every person who appears proud, is a proud person. We meant that the features of pride appear in the behaviour of a person.** We ought to examine ourselves in order not to cause others to stumble, and not to lose their friendship and love to us, as a result of repelling them when we behave in this manner.

Pride might take an outside appearance **in the way one walks**, as one walks in a haughty way elevated above the rest of the human race. When you walk on the ground, you should feel that you walk over the bodies of other humans like yourself, whose bodies turned to dust, hundreds of years ago. The poet rightfully said:

"Walk gently as I think that
you walk on these bodies"

The day will come when your own body whose grace, beauty and splendour, you show off, also turns to dust. The Wise said "What has man to be so proud of ? He is only dust and ashes" (Sirach 10:10).

Pride may take an appearance **of luxurious dressing**, excessive smartness and many non-essentials. The Apostle said "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Timothy 6:8), and he did not say for example "And having nourishment and dressing, with these we shall be content". The food is what fills our hunger, and the clothing is what covers our nakedness, and what a difference between the two expressions. Like a meek son, imitate your meek God, Who did not own two dollars to pay the temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27). He Himself is the owner of heaven and earth, Who preferred poverty of His own will, and had nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20).

Sometimes, pride shows its appearance in talking. We do not mean the meaning of the words themselves, but the way one talks, as if he talks with authority, in an ordering manner. Also in the tone of his voice, being very high, officious. Account for yourself, and imitate your Teacher about whom they said "He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench" (Matthew 12:19, 20). Do not speak to anybody with authority, but instead be meek, even in the situation which requires you to give orders. Purify your words from the errors in the situation of necessary anger, as it is said "Be angry, and do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26).

F) PRIDE CONCEALED WITHIN VIRTUE

We mentioned earlier what increases the danger of pride is that it disguises itself in virtue or hides behind it. Consider for example:

(1) The Good Example:

The devil might fight a person who labours in the life of virtue, tries to deprive him of all rewards for his deeds and striving. He tries to convince him that he is asked to be a good example and light to the world. The devil will produce some Biblical verses to support his deceit such as "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). **Once that person gets convinced with this rotten advice, the devil makes him shape his behaviour, what he says and does, so as to appear a good example to the people.** He feels - while fulfilling this command - that he helps in spreading the kingdom of God on earth, to the letter of the verse. It is clear that **it is the 'devil of pride' who leads us into this temptation, so that all our devotion be for the people, and not for God.** Since our devotion is for the people, it is suitable to accept their appreciation and praises, but meanwhile we have already received our reward.

Do not be confused in your mind as to what this person does, and count it as hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a different sin from what we are talking about. The hypocrite is a man who pretends to be virtuous, and dresses in its robe, while his inside is full of sin, and he knows that. Or as the Apostle sees it "Having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5).

The case we are mentioning is that of a man who loves virtue and truly strives for it. Yet instead of offering his worship to God, asking for His pleasure, he deviates by the deceit of the devil, to please the people under the cover of being a good example. Our teacher St. Paul said a frank saying in this matter "Not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart,

fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:22-24).

If the 'devil of vain praises' fights you in this manner using Biblical verses, as he dared previously in the tempting of your Master, hit him with the arrows of humility. Fight him with "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). In the past the Psalmist said "Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:5). Similar arrows were used by the saints. St. John El-Dargy said **"Do not agree when the 'devil of vain praises' hints to you to expose your virtues for the benefit of those who see them. Remember the saying of the Lord 'For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?'"** (Matthew 16:26)".

(2) Not to Be A Stumbling Block to Others:

The 'devil of pride' may hide under the cover of caring that you should not trip others by certain behaviour. In this case our refraining from evil and not committing sin, is due to our care not to trip others instead of for pleasing God Himself (it pleases Him also not to trip others). When we do good we should do it for goodness sake, and because God - the Great Good - commanded us to do it, even that others benefit directly from what it produces, or as a good example. Also when we avoid evil, we do that because it is not suitable - as the children of God - to do evil, because God is our Father - Who detests evil, hates it - commanded us to refrain from evil. Evil may hurt some people as a direct result of its outcome, or as a stumbling block. Hence, our avoidance of causing others to stumble ought to be that tripping others is not suitable in itself. Again what we said in the previous point concerning being good example, we say here also, which is that avoiding evil should be for the sake of God, not the people.

There is another matter which is included under this title. It is **"Defending one's self for the sake of avoiding tripping others"**. **There exists a person who when blame is directed at him, or an error related to him, he becomes furious in defending himself, pushed by inner pride. In reality he wants to appear without blemish in front of people.** However, he might struggle with his conscience which tries to prevent him from defending himself for the sake of humility. Yet he tries to deceive his conscience hiding behind the virtue of avoiding being a stumbling block to others. The real scale with which we measure the virtues of the heart in this case, is the answer to our question to him: Is your desire not to trip others, the only reason for defending your self? Or is there another desire, which is your care to appear without fault in front of the people, for the sake of your spiritual reputation and your dignity? Do the two reasons exist together? If so, which is the stronger reason? Which is the chief and only one, while in most cases, the reason is just a false cover, or a self deception which adds to the sin of pride another sin!

Dear brother, this is the deceit of the 'devil of pride', do not listen or respond to him. Put in front of you the picture of your Master, and your Holy Teacher, about Whom it is said "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

Also put in front of you the pictures of the saints who truly denied themselves, accepted accusations patiently, and did not defend their honor and reputation, and by that defeated their strongest enemies. **Among them is St. Macarius the Great.** A young woman accused him of committing adultery with her and said she was bearing a child by him. The Saint suffered greatly from this untrue accusation, from insults, curses, and beatings. During all that, he kept quiet, and never defended himself. Finally, by the help of some wise people, the family of the young woman let him go, on the condition that he pays maintenance to the child when it is born. The Saint doubled the work of his hands and used to say to himself "Work hard Macara (Macarius), as if you now had a wife". However, when time came, the pregnant woman had great difficulties to give birth to the child, and had no comfort until she confessed the truth, and that she sinned against the Saint. The people of the village were very surprised at the endurance of the Saint and his self denial, and were very sorry for what they did to him. Their wrath against him turned to desire to honor and apologise to him. They went to where he stayed, but could not find him, as he had fled to the desert away from the vainglory.

As we mention this story, we do not ask you to imitate it, as there is no divine command which prevents you from defending your self in an untrue case, when there is a need for that. We mentioned it to present you with a superb picture of our Saints who despised themselves in order to escape from the vainglory. Then after that, you should not be furious, or spend much effort in defending yourself in trivial matters, or the like, responding to the 'devil of pride' who hides behind such thoughts.

(3) Defending the Truth and Principles:

As the 'devil of pride' pushes someone and excites him to defend himself, in order not to trip the rest of the people, likewise, he moves him to be obstinate, insistent, haughty, and arrogant, under the cover of defending the truth. The behaviour of a person in defending the truth, is what shows him that he is untruthful. The truth defends itself without arrogance, noise, or shouting. As the sun rises up from a dark night, the troops of darkness fly away. The style of a person when he speaks, may indicate his self pride and conceit. But when he is confronted, he pretends that he is defending the truth. He might have sincere intentions, but still he is deceiving himself.

Under the same point comes the manner in which a person defends some principles. This is felt in spiritual circles, the circle of ascetic life, and in religious services. It is good and useful to follow a certain spiritual principle in the general spiritual life. But it is wrong for somebody to feel that he alone is right and all who are against him are wrong. This is but pride of a special kind, we call it the "**pride of principles**". God does not have just one way for us to reach Him, and serving Him could be in different ways, and in most cases all these different ways complement each other.

(4) The Glory of the Religious or the Social Position:

It happens sometimes that some of those who occupy important positions, either in the

Church or in the Society, think that they should appear in a dignified manner for the sake of the positions they occupy. In fact, it is the 'devil of pride' who owns this idea. If humility raises us to heaven, would it not raise us in the eyes of the people? If the Apostle says "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6), does not He give us this grace in the eyes of the people, and they submit to us in love and honor us in gratitude?! **We did not know God as such, until He was incarnate in the flesh, put on the robe of humility as a dress to hide His Divinity. Yet in spite of that everybody feared Him. Some times they dared not ask Him. It never happened that the humility of the Lord Jesus wavered His reverence or erased His honor.**

If humility was necessary for everybody who occupies a principal position, in general, it is especially necessary to those who occupy positions in the Church. In that the teacher Origen says **"In most cases, pride results in a person because of his ignorant of the meanings of clerical orders, the degrees of priesthood and deaconry. How many priests forget humility after they are ordained, as if they were ordained in order to stop being humble!!** They rather increase in their humility when they gain their degrees, according to the words of the Holy Bible "Increase in humility, as you increased in greatness" (Sirach 3:18). As the Church elected you, bow down your head in humility. You became a chief, so do not elevate yourself, but be like any one of them. It is essential to be humble, it is essential to be insulted, and it is essential to escape from pride the head of all evil".

Pride does not earn the chief or the director, respect or regard. It is spirituality which does that, especially in the clerical orders. But pride pulls down the religious chief or the church minister, because it does not suit the nature of his office.

GENERAL CAUSES FOR PRIDE:

As pride is created in us for personal reasons, it is also created for general or collective reasons. We mean that someone might not feel proud of himself or his character, but of some general thing such as his family, his town, or the religious organization to which he belongs (society or Sunday School). It is clear that our glory in these matters indicates pride working in ourselves. That is beside the superficiality of our thinking and the lack of depth in our spiritual life. In the past our Teacher St. Paul rebuked the Corinthians saying "For when one says, "I am of Paul", and another, "I am of Apollos", are you not carnal? ... Therefore let no one boast in men" (1 Corinthians 3:4, 21). He also said to the Galatians "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing **in himself alone, and not in another.** For each one shall bear his own load" (Galatians 6:3-5).

Do not glory dear brother, except in God. The Apostle says "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). Do not glory in joining a famous religious organization, or that you serve in a well known Sunday School. Do not glory in that, as this will not save you, and does not benefit you in front of the fearful and just pulpit of Christ in the Last Day. But always glory in the Lord, imitating the sweet Psalmist David who used to say "My soul shall make its boast in the Lord" (Psalm 34:2).

The reason for our true glory is that we are the children of God. Our glory increases when we see His Holy Name hallowed in the mouths of many, after He reign on their hearts.

G) HOW DOES ONE DEAL WITH HIS OWN PRIDE?

When we were dealing with the causes of pride, we spoke about some remedies to these causes. We here complement them by the following:

1. Ratio of Goodness to the Work of Grace:

Feel that whatever goodness you have is from God, Who when He perfected man, "Saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). Repeat with prophet Daniel "O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face" (Daniel 9:7). Do not be taken by the deceitful glory of the world, nor by its momentary sweetness, since sourness and bitterness follow. Be ascetic in the world, and all that is in it. It is going to end also its desire.

2. Hiding the Virtues:

If God has helped you and offered you some virtues or gifts, do not speak about them in front of others, even if you attained them after a long and difficult effort. Always let your feeling in your striving be the saying of the Lord God "When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do"" (Luke 17:10). **Hide your virtues so that they grow. They are like the treasure which when uncovered, becomes prone to be stolen.** The mother of Moses (the prophet) hid her child for three months. Likewise, virtue which is born from the soul, if not hid from the spiritual Pharaoh, who is Satan, will not grow. **The Saints behaved in this manner in their lives and hid their virtues. Sometimes they used to behave in certain ways or say special words aiming to hide their virtues.** When they had to speak about matters they experienced in their spiritual lives, they told them as if they happened to others. If you expose your virtues for the people to praise and exalt you, know well that you have received your reward here on earth. Abraham, the father of all the faithful said to the rich man "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things" (Luke 16:25). The Lord Jesus when He spoke about the hypocrites who gloried in their virtues "that they may be seen by men" said "Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (Matthew 6:5).

3. Great Awareness, Especially by Church Ministers:

The ministers of the Word, whether the priests, preachers, or Sunday School teachers, and in general **all those who are busy in the service of saving souls, are in need, more than others to be extremely aware from the 'devil of vainglory'. That is because of what sometimes accompanies these services from blessings, helps, graces, miracles and might. The 'devil of vainglory' uses them to let pride enter into the souls of those ministers.** We need to understand two matters:

First: The grace which God gives us in our services, is not necessarily because of our holiness, but may be for the benefit of the souls which we serve, whom He loves and He died for.

Second: God shows Himself in His work in order to glorify His Holy name. Hence the work of God is not constrained by the goodness of the workers, but "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). A clearer evidence of that is what the Lord Jesus said "Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:22, 23). The minister may be a factor for saving of many souls, and in spite of that his own soul may perish as St. Paul said "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

As ministers, and as we feel the grace of God, we should give thanks and praises to God, knowing that it is not we who serve, but it is God working in us, with us, and by us. As the Apostle says "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase... **For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field**" (1 Corinthians 3:7, 9). Also "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God **were pleading through us:** we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). **Hence, you are but a fellow worker with God, He preaches through you. It is He who preaches, even when it is through you.**

Hurry after the service and give thanks to God, by praying for His help and work with you. So that when the 'devil of vainglory' comes and plants tares in your thoughts, and finds a place in you, you push him away by saying - as one of the Saints used to do - "you are late, I have offered every thing to God".

We find this attitude clear in the personality of the minister **St. Sarabamone Abu-Tarha**, Bishop of Monoufia, Egypt, in the last century. God granted him the gift of healing and of exorcism. After he did a miracle, he used to go to his room, and people could hear him struggling with himself, which is moved by the 'devil of vainglory'. People used to hear him talking to himself saying "You Salib (his name before his monasticism), you who are nothing and rotten, you who used to sell oil (his former profession), you make miracles!. It is Christ Who makes them". He used to do that until the 'devil of vainglory' departed from him.

In our ministry, God Himself wants us to be humble in order to be worthy of more grace from Him, and to be shielded from the sin which made hosts of angels, and our original parents fall. God appeared to Moses on Mount Horeb, in the bush, gave him a message to deliver

to Pharaoh, and made him a leader for his people by means of the miracle which God would do at his hands. God made a miracle before Moses' eyes, which was that the rod in his hand turned into a serpent, then to a rod again. God told Moses "Now put your hand in your bosom". And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. And He said, "Put your hand in your bosom again". So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh (Exodus 4:2-7). **The aim of God in this last miracle, was to give Moses a spiritual lesson in self denial, in order not to become haughty due to the miracles which God will make at his hands. That was to teach Moses a practical lesson; the hand which, a moment ago, did a miracle, can become leprous in an instant.**

Hence, let us not put our trust in our minds which think, our mouths which talk, teach and preach, nor in our hands which work and build, knowing that it is God Who is the Worker in us and by us.

4. Remembering Sins:

That is knowing one's self and remembering his past sins, which makes him feel ashamed and embarrassed. The purpose of that is for ourselves to be humble in our own eyes. The fact that God forgave me and wiped away my sins, means that at one time I abused and insulted Him. It is good then that I remember my sins and wrong deeds to humble myself. For this David the prophet said "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:3). That was even after Nathan said to David "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Samuel 12:13).

5. Knowing the Right Measure of Greatness:

The right measures of greatness in the eyes of the children of the world, were, and still are, the material measures, such as fortune, greatness, influence, riches, wealth, worldly positions, and scientific degrees, ..., etc. This was the first error committed by the first man, and for which he was driven out of paradise and lost many blessings, and for which he still misses very many graces.

To correct the situation, the Lord Jesus illustrated the fallacies of these worldly measures by His sayings. He also displayed by His Holy Self and in His life when He was in the flesh, that denying one's self with all that it entails of poverty in the spirit and denial of worldly glory, is the measure of real greatness.

At the time when He opened His arms to accept evil people into His bosom, forgave the adulteresses, and said to one of them caught in the very act "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:2-11), we find Him speaking harshly against pride and the proud in the personality of the Scribes and Pharisees and enumerating the woes to them (See Matthew 23). He also disapproved of pretentious worshipping, the love to lord over others, and of first places. In that He said "For whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:13). He also said "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). When the mother of Zebedee's sons came asking Him to grant that her two sons may sit, one on His right and the other on His left in His Kingdom, and as a result, the ten were moved in indignation, Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it

over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; **but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave**--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:20-28).

The personality of John the Baptist, which is witnessed by the Lord Jesus as the greatest among those born from women (Matthew 11:11), explains the secret behind this greatness. This was given in the announcement of the angel to his father Zacharias "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15). **Hence real greatness is the greatness "in the sight of the Lord". It is the greatness of virtue, and the Holy communion with the Heavenly Father.** It is the greatness of the life of the spirit, the life of deprivation, asceticism in the world and its glory. It is the greatness of good spiritual examples, led by self-denial.

What about John the Baptist, the greatest among those born of women? What about his position, strength, honor, dominion, wealth, and his culture? All of these were not in accordance with the understanding of the society. But he was "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight" (Mark 1:3). He did not dress in luxurious or lavish clothes, he did not eat at the tables of kings or of great people, and he had no wealth inherited from his ancestors, or a position handed to him by his father. In spite of that, the king dreaded him, the chief priests feared him, and the multitude respected him as a great prophet. The multitude used to come to him to be baptized, confessing their sins. As a whole, he was great in front of the people, because "he was great in the sight of God". Perhaps, the secret of his greatness is him denying himself, and depriving himself from what most people want, but even spend their lives to get.

Again, what about Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, and the Philosopher of Christianity? Paul the great who was caught up to the third heaven, and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Corinthians 12:4). Paul the great, the maker of miracles, who even when handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, the diseases left them and evil spirits went out of them (Acts 19:12). Paul the great missionary who had laboured more abundantly than any of the apostles (2 Corinthian 11:23-33). In spite of that he used to say it is not proper for him to boast and "If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity" (2 Corinthians 11:30). Paul the missionary who had a giant spiritual personality, who when he was a prisoner, his judge was trembling from him - Felix the ruler - as he was listening to Paul telling him "About righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). Paul the preacher of salvation, was so admired by the multitude, that they declared him a god, and wanted to offer sacrifices for him, but he tore his clothes (Acts 14:11-14).

The secret of the greatness of St. Paul was self-denial. He counted himself as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all (1 Corinthians 4:13). **He forgot every thing: his knowledge, his philosophy, his acquaintances, his ministry and his toil. He refused every worldly honor presented to him. He admitted his weaknesses and so the power of God descended on him, declared his ignorance and so took wisdom from God "Not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing" (1 Corinthians 2:6).** No wonder, it is enough for him what he heard from God saying "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9)

This is the secret of true greatness: is to be great for the Lord, great in piety and virtue, great in the life of the spirit, and great in elective asceticism and deprivation.