

## THE WEAKNESS OF GOD

We all have the innate ability to seize the limelight. There is a bit of Pharisee in each of us, and it comes out whenever we talk about ourselves, flaunt our talents, drop words of self-praise or simply think we are great. We always want others to form a good opinion of ourselves. To this end we exaggerate, claiming to possess qualities we do not really have or embellishing our record to make it look impressive. Sometimes we flatter to satisfy our vanity or blow up our defects to draw sympathy. We resort to anything that puts us on the center-stage. The most profitable business in the world, it is said, is to buy us for what we are worth and sell us for what we think we are worth. You could just imagine the margin of profit.

The great Mathematician-Physicist Albert Einstein felt uneasy with praise. "There are plenty of the well-endowed, thank God," he said. "It strikes me as unfair, and even bad taste, to select a few of them for boundless admiration, attributing superhuman powers of mind and character to them. This has been my fate, and the contrast between the popular estimate of my powers and achievements and the reality is simply grotesque."

Pride is the ultimate cause of all moral disorders. It is the first capital sin. It is so vicious that it drives us to challenge God Himself, ignoring our creatural status. Proud people tend to persist in their error owing to a consequent incapacity to see things objectively. Conceit and vanity make us impermeable to divine grace, unyielding to calls for conversion. That is why "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jm 4:6).

Feelings of superiority often masks inferiority complex. Both attitudes set us apart from others, because we are either better or worse. When we are excluded from a group, our isolation can lead us to prove our worth, using one of three tactics: generalize, boot-lick or humiliate. People who generalize hone one skill, try to do their best in that area and then think they are the best in everything. *Guinness Book of World Records* reinforces this kind of attitude, for it celebrates peculiar feats, no matter how queer. It's funny but we can make a name for ourselves by swallowing the most number of hotdogs in a minute, or staying awake for two weeks, or traveling the farthest distance by a farm tractor. Low self-esteem individuals may also try to compensate their deficiency by getting close to a powerful person, a method called boot-licking. They are sycophants. They have no qualms to shelve ethics and morals in favor of what is expedient. Privileged positions may make them appear great, but deep inside they are miserable. Another form of making up for inferiority complex is by humiliating others. The recourse to abuse, whether verbal, physical, psychological, or sexual, is their way of putting others down, way below themselves, thereby "uplifting" their status.

Pride leads to self-seeking. We do things to be seen by others. The desire to be praised is what propels us to act. We offer help if it is publicized, incapable of casting bread upon the waters. Self-interest wastes away whatever merit we might have earned. Benevolence out of egoism is malevolence. When we are proud, every virtue we may have is turned into a vice.

Self-love and vanity create an artificial self: face-lift, hair implant, tummy tuck, nose job, breast enlargement and other cosmetic surgeries. Vanity stares long at the mirror, makes affected poise, sports tattoos, follows rigorous diets, measures one's steps, conjures up virtual triumphs, wears flamboyant ornaments, and avoids menial tasks.

Pride makes us touchy, defensive and stubborn. Quarrels are often bred and blown up by pride. We refuse to budge even though we know we are wrong. We never make the first move to patch things up with our adversaries. Worse, we become vindictive. Pride makes us hide our defects and pretend we are okay. It robs us of interior freedom. We become complicated. Self-centeredness leads to self-imprisonment. The fear of being known as we are makes us artificial. Candor and simplicity are not among our traits. On the contrary, we craft a false self image. But people cannot fail to notice the mask that we wear and it turns them off. Given the chance, they would stay away from us. Our hypocrisy inevitably gives rise to suspicion and distrust.

Humility is the mark of great men and women. I was happily surprised to get hold of a book that extols this virtue as a quality of dynamic leaders. In a best-seller entitled *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins proves that behind the success of excellent companies and organizations we find an able and humble boss. Normally “they didn’t talk about themselves...but about the company and the contributions of other executives... When pressed about themselves, they’d say things like, ‘I hope I’m not sounding like a big shot.’ Or, ‘I don’t think I can take much credit. We were blessed with marvelous people.’ Or, ‘There are plenty of people in this company who could do my job better than I do.’”

Lord, make me truly humble. Humility is what I find most difficult to live, yet it is the virtue I am most in need. Pride often finds its way into my thoughts, words and actions. It impairs my judgment and blurs my supernatural vision. It establishes a barrier between you and me; between me and my neighbor. You know, Lord, how deeply rooted is my self-love. Let me never belittle others. Show me how to trample upon my ego. Free my mind of vain thoughts. May I learn to accept my own limitations. Guard me against sadness and despair, for these are unmistakable signs of pride. Help me to rise every time I fall. Let me approach you, not as the Pharisee, but as one who trusts that the humility of God is my strength and my humility is the weakness of God.