

“The Seven Deadly Sins: Superbia (Pride)”

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Luke 12:32-40

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. “But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Prayer.

Pride;

a strong sense of self-respect,
a refusal to be humiliated,
a joy in one's accomplishments,
“what's-the-matter
with a little bit of pride?”
you rightly ask.

I've heard it said many times in my life
that “if only people took a little more pride
in what they do, we'd all benefit.”

It is as if a little bit of pride
could instantly result in higher quality:
better cars, and bridges to drive over,
better tasting food, and silverware to eat it
with,
better government, and less taxes to squeeze
out more.

A number of years ago,

in a rare moment of crystal clear honesty,
an astronaut was asked by a reporter
how proud he was to take part in the space
program.

He replied something like this,
“How proud do you think I am,
strapped in without escape,
tied to tons of high explosives,
in a contraption that was
bid out to the lowest bidder?”

Could a little more pride
result in a better world?

An excess of pride has been called hubris,
a term Aristotle used
to depict a tragic hero's downfall.

Excessive pride is also known as arrogance;
taking rights or advantages,
as if they were divinely granted,
but with complete disregard of others.

Excessive pride is the competitive belief

in self-sufficiency, self-reliance,
the self-made man or woman;
its symptom is power and domination,
authority wielded with increasing
recklessness.

The founding fathers of America
recognized the dangers of excessive pride,
how it might cause the chief executive
to overstep his or her authority,
to remove the fine balance of government
between the three estates:
Legislative, judicial, and executive branches
of constitutional, representative government.
They had lived under a pride-filled king
- it wasn't good -
and it had led to revolution.
They did not want the chief executive
to become king,
with disregard to congress or to the courts.
So Madison, Jefferson, Franklin, and others,
provided a legal remedy for pride.
It is called impeachment.
Impeachment is such an important principle
it is mentioned six times in the constitution.
It does not mean that government is broken,
rather, when invoked,
it means government is working properly.
It means the people want balance,
a return to a system of checks and balances.
Impeachment is simply an indictment
of high crimes and misdemeanors
against the people.
If indicted, the impeached may
temper pride with humility
and repent of their ways,
(yea, right, like that is ever going to happen)
or face conviction
- conviction being the second half of the
remedy -
and removal from office.

“Pride goes before a fall”
Proverbs 16:18 is so often paraphrased.
Pride builds and overflows
and this is what leads to
the inevitable fall.

It is so easy to kick politicians,
because they are so visible,
so exposed to the highest detail of scrutiny,
while, at the same time,
so filled with power and authority.
Undoubtedly, many find this fateful
combination
too hard to resist
- a public life filled with power
builds pride and stokes the ego
to unsustainable heights -
then the world comes crashes down
with the latest story on the evening news:
conservative politician caught with
prostitutes,
or, liberal lawmaker caught taking a bribe,
or, ... you get the picture.

But how about pride
when it comes to you and me?

We are not so public
(most of us)
as politicians or celebrities in the news.
We like the anonymity
of being cocooned in the suburbs,
of closing our garage doors behind us
with a push of a button.
Yet, we still have our social facade
amongst our family, our friends,
even with our church family.
It is within these microcosms
reflective of larger society
that I would challenge us to consider this day,
“wherein lies my guilt?”
“Where in my life

am I guilty of the sin of pride?"

Pay attention to the symptoms
good medical education teaches;
listen to what the symptoms are telling you.
Symptoms of pride here
are the reckless use of power and
domination.
So, ask yourselves,
over whom to I exert power and domination?
Is it a tattered person pushing a shopping cart
against another and against God?
or confined to a wheelchair
or the weakling driving that compact car?
Is it a secretary, peer, or employee?
Is it a son, a daughter, or sibling?
Is it over a aging parent,
a child,
or someone whose
lifestyle is different from ours?
With whom am I arrogant,
over whom do I lord?
Search the symptoms
and you'll find the disease.

In almost every list
Pride is considered the original
and most serious
of the seven deadly sins,
and indeed the ultimate source
from which the others arise.¹
It is the reason
Christian myth tells us
that Lucifer was struck down from heaven
as a fallen angel
to become Satan
the lord of hades and hell.
It is the reason
in Dante's *Divine Comedy*
the penitent were forced to walk
with stone slabs

¹ With thanks to:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_deadly_sins

bearing down on their backs
to induce feelings of humility.²

Now that we've located it,
"how is it so evil?"
we rightly ask.
What makes it
the most serious,
the most deadly,
the worst possible sin
against another and against God?

1. Pride is first and foremost, a thief;
one who takes, what one does not have.
God gives every individual free choice;
pride steals free choice from the weak.
Pride robs free choice from the lowly;
the widow, the orphan,
the disenfranchised
throw-away people of this world.
Pride takes civil rights from
minority races, creeds, and cultures
and attempts to violently
impose the will of the prideful
over the helpless minds of the few.

2. Pride is secondly, idolatrous;
assuming the roll of god (with a little "g").
It doesn't matter
if, in our evil empire
we lord it over one
or a thousand
or a billion,
the pride-filled man or woman makes
a golden calf of themselves.
Pride takes divinity,
and sovereignty,
and authority
away from God (with a big "G")
the Lord, our God.
For those of you keeping count:

² *ibid.*

that would be two of the commandments;
thou shalt not steal
and thou shalt not have any gods before Me.³

3. Finally, pride is selfish,
leaving no room for God to be.
The Psalmist correctly observes,
“In his pride
the wicked does not seek him;
in all his thoughts
there is no room for God.”⁴
The selfish has no time
no reason
to love the Lord our God
with all the heart, mind, soul, or strength.
The selfish, pride-filled man or woman
has no reason to love the neighbor as the
self.

The arrogant, self-made icon in society
fails to recognize the grace of God,
because they are too impressed
with their own importance.
The vain
are collectors of earthly treasures,
in spite of Jesus' commands to behave
otherwise
as we are told in our Gospel lesson for this
morning.⁵

The final point to be considered
is this:
once we recognize pride within our own lives,
and secondly, when we see
the true seriousness of prides' nature,
what then,
we must ask
if we are to take the faithful life seriously,
“what then are we to do to cure ourselves
from the sinful state of pride?”

³ Exodus 20:15 and Exodus 20:3.

⁴ Psalm 10:4

⁵ See Luke 12 above

The classic remedy for pride
is the holy virtue of humility.
Instead of seating yourself at the head table,
take your place at the rear,
at the table of least importance,
so that when the host comes,
you might be invited forward,
Jesus taught in Luke 14:7-11.

In a similar way
Matthew 21:11-12 finds Jesus
teaching his disciples:

“¹¹The greatest among you will be your
servant.

¹²All who exalt themselves will be humbled,
and all who humble themselves will be
exalted.”

Humble the self,
and let the rest take care of its own.
Place the self in a position of service,
placing the needs of others
before the needs of our own.
Lose the pretentious ego,
and deflate it with modesty.
Temper the soul with discipline,
submitting oneself wholly and completely to
God,
“never reaching out to things above”
as Thomas Aquinas would say.⁶
Do not be tempted by false humility
which is a veiled attempt to allow
pride to return through the back door.
Recognize our limits;
the limits of our talents, our ability,
and our authority,
and keep within the self.

Allow me to close

⁶ Summa Contra Gent., bk. IV, ch. lv, tr.

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with these words
 from the apostle Paul
 to the church in Philippi:
 “If then there is any encouragement in Christ,
 any consolation from love,
 any sharing in the Spirit,
 any compassion and sympathy,
 make my joy complete:
 be of the same mind,
 having the same love,
 being in full accord
 and of one mind.
 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,
 but in humility
 regard others as better than yourselves.
 Let each of you
 look not to your own interests,
 but to the interests of others.
 Let the same mind be in you
 that was in Christ Jesus,
 who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited,
 but emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness.
 And being found in human form,
 he humbled himself
 and became obedient
 to the point of death
 – even death on a cross.
 Therefore God also highly exalted him
 and gave him the name
 that is above every name,
 so that at the name of Jesus
 every knee should bend,
 in heaven
 and on earth
 and under the earth,
 and every tongue should confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.”
 Amen.

7 Philippians 2:1-11 (NRSV)