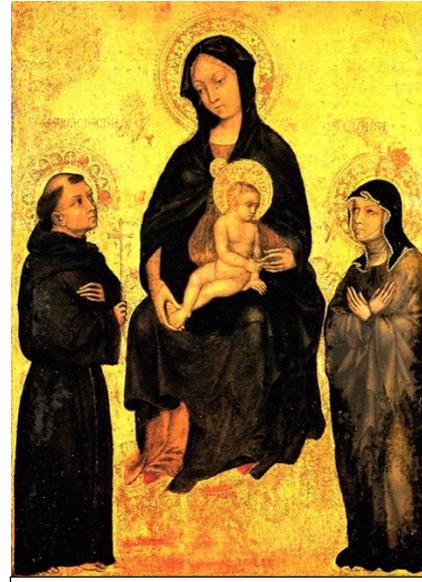


SISTER HUMILITY OF CHRIST

Have on hand: Catechism

Jesus Christ is the exemplar of humility. St. Francis reveled in this reality. We recall the words of Sacred Scripture, how Jesus emptied himself as told to us by St. Paul in Philippians (2:3-8): “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.” (Also see *Matthew 20:17-28*.)



Gentile da Fabriano: Madonna in Glory between Sts. Francis and Clare, ca. 1390-1395

In our *Rule*, we read in Article #9: “The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call.” And in Article #11: “Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life, even though he valued created things attentively and lovingly.”

Q1. What are some of the false descriptions among Catholics for this word “humility,” – as people around us often use it? – to put oneself down? – to act as though we didn’t do anything when we did? When is a person a “show-off”?

In Catholic Church teachings (*Catechism*, Glossary-Humility, p. 882), Humility is defined as “The virtue by which a Christian acknowledges that God is the author of all good.” (See *Catechism* §2546, §2559, §2713 and Glossary for Humility and Pride.)

Q2. Explain: “Sincere love leads to humility.”

Of St. Francis we read: “In order to show himself contemptible and to give others an example of true confession, when he did something wrong he was not ashamed to confess it in his preaching before all the people. In fact, if he had perhaps thought ill of someone or for some reason let slip a harsh word, he would go with all humility to the person of whom he had said or thought something wrong and, confessing his sin, would ask forgiveness.”¹

Thomas of Celano stated: “The man of God not only showed himself humble to the great, but also to his peers and to the lowly, more willing to be admonished and corrected than to admonish others. For example, one day he was riding a donkey, since he was too weak and sickly to walk, and he passed through the field of a peasant who was working there. The peasant ran to him and asked anxiously if he were Brother Francis. When the man of God humbly answered that he was, the peasant said: ‘Try hard to be as good as everyone says you are, because many people put their trust in you. So I’m warning you; don’t ever be different from what people expect!’ When the man of God, Francis, heard this, he got down from the donkey on to the ground, and prostrate before the peasant, humbly kissed his feet, thanking him for being so kind to admonish him.”²

Bonaventure said that “Francis, the pattern of humility, wanted his brothers to be called Lesser ... they had come to the school of the humble Christ to learn humility. The teacher of humility, Jesus Christ, to instruct his disciples in true humility, said: ‘Whoever wishes to become great among you, let him be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you will be your slave.’” [*Mt 20:26*]³

Another definition is offered by Damien Vorreux, O.F.M.: “Humility is not a debasing of ourselves but a simple acknowledgement that we possess nothing of our own except our sins and vices.”⁴

Q3. Why does this seem to be so hard for us humans to acknowledge? What can be done about it?

Q4. How important is true humility?

Q5. Is there a place for “just pride”? Why?

Q6. What do I think of this description, that “Humility is truth”?

Bonaventure explained that St. Francis would remind himself: “Francis, if the Most High had given so much to a thief, he would be more grateful than you!”⁵

While St. Francis’ 28 *Admonitions* were addressed to the friars, the principles are the same for us. Three times the issue of humility surfaces in Francis’ *Admonitions* [XVII; XIX, and XXIII]. By contrast, *Admonition V* deals with pride.



Domenico Ghirlandaio: Renunciation of Worldly Goods, ca. 1483-1486

“Blessed is that servant who no more exalts himself over the good the Lord says or does through him than over what He says or does through another. A person sins who wishes to receive more from his neighbor than what he wishes to give of himself to the Lord God.”⁶

“Blessed is the servant who does not consider himself any better when he is praised and exalted by people than when he is considered worthless, simple, and looked down upon, for what a person is before God, that he is and no more. Woe to that religious who has been placed in a high position by others and [who] does not want to come down by his own will. Blessed is that servant who is not placed in a high position by his own will and always desires to be under the feet of others.”⁷

St. Francis reminds us to consider: “Blessed is the servant who has been found as humble among his subjects as he was among his masters. Blessed is the servant who always remains under the rod of correction. Faithful and prudent is the servant who does not delay in punishing himself for all his offenses, inwardly through contrition and outwardly through confession and penance for what he did.”⁸

Q7. We just read: “for what a person is before God, that he is and no more.” How is St. Francis’ advice here a good norm by which we can judge ourselves, and even others? [This leads to honesty with God, and serves us well with our examination of conscience – to see how we are in the sight of God – not how other persons see us.]

Q8. In what ways is our Blessed Mother a model of humility? (See the Magnificat for how she lived.)

¹ FA:ED, *The Life of Saint Francis, First Book*, 1228-1229, Vol. I, p. 228, Chapter XIX, v. 54

² FA:ED, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul, Second Book*, Vol. II, p. 339, Chapter CIII: His humility to the Bishop of Terni and a peasant, v. 142

³ FA:ED, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, 1260-1263, Vol. II, p. 572, Chapter Six, v. 5

⁴ *First Encounter With Francis of Assisi*, D. Vorreux, 2012, p. 58

⁵ FA:ED, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, 1260-1263, Vol. II, p. 571, Chapter Six, v. 3

⁶ FA:ED, *The Undated Writings, The Admonitions*, Vol. I, p. 134: XVII: The humble servant of God

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 135: XIX: A humble servant of God

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 136: XXIII: Humility