

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Humility: A Powerful Paradox"



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Mary D. Ford

St. Francis de Sales was captivated by these words of Jesus: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy; my burden is light." (Mt 11: 28-30)

Francis sees in Christ's self-description the heart of what it means to be divine...and the heart of what it means to be human.

In the Book of the Prophet Micah, we hear: "With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?...God has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Mi 6: 6-8)

Paul's Letter to the Philippians presents us with what some describe as the great "hymn" to humility, the vision of Christ "who, being in the very nature of God, did not deem equality with God something at which to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in human appearance, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death — even death on a cross..." (Phil 2: 6—9)

The problem, of course, is that trying to be humble can be very hard work...especially if the humility that we are trying to live is a *false* humility: self-deprecation; self-deception; a diminution of who we are...in the sight of God.

Authentic humility is about living in the truth — the whole truth — of who we are. Authentic humility is about practicing "spiritual realism" (Michael Crosby, OFM). Simply put, authentic humility is about knowing your place...and taking it.

Look at Jesus himself. He knew God's will for him. He knew his place — his place in God's plan of salvation for all of us. He had the conviction — and the courage — to take his God-given place in the lives of others.

And in this humility, this authentic humility, Jesus found his greatness, for "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2: 9-11)

To be truly humble is to know your place in your own little corner of God's great and glorious world, to seize it, to grasp it, to take hold of it. To be truly humble is to take stock of your gifts, talents, abilities, wisdom, limitations, liabilities, weakness, igno-

rance — all of who you are — and to make yourself great by placing them all at the service of others...in ways that God expects.

This authentic humility is rooted in our relationship with God...and expressed in relationships with others. St. Paul challenges: "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." (Phil 2: 1—5)

Biblical humility — Christian humility — God-centered humility — is not about putting myself down. It's not about trying to be less of who I am. Rather, it is about knowing my God-given place and having the guts to take it: to experience true greatness by serving the needs of my brothers and sisters.

As humility goes, what a great—and paradoxically, powerful—way to live one's life!

