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Humility

Fr. Bernard Massarini, CM, AIC International Spiritual Advisor

Humility has a bad press in this day and age when many people think we can only find happiness if we use all our faculties. Now St Vincent, our elder brother, said that though all the words of the Gospel must be the rule of Mission: *“some of it, in fact, has more application to us, particularly when it emphasizes simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for souls”* (SVP XIIIa, 117a Common Rules of the CM, no.14, p.438). But what is humility? We think that to be humble means to consider ourselves of little value, to judge ourselves unworthy of attention, to think that we are not fit to carry out actions.

However, if we go back to the first meaning of humility, the root of the word refers to its Latin origin: “humus”: earth, compost, therefore our origin. Humility is about knowing and welcoming our origin. We are from the earth, it is what we are made of. What we are made of should not be belittled. Many of us feel unworthy of being what we are, and so we are in an unworthy attitude with God. Let us not begin by telling God that we are not a successful creature, because then we are unfaithful to his love.

Humility must help us to know how to take our place properly. To live up to the trust given to us, without overestimating or underestimating ourselves. We must work tirelessly among ourselves to live in our rightful places, those places that the earth has given us. As teammates with our companions, mothers in our families, wives with our husbands, professionals in our work, let us be committed and devoted when we serve. In other words: let us take our rightful place.

The original sin of our biblical ancestors is not eating fruit. They were beloved creatures of God, who had just finished his work by declaring: “God saw that it was very good”. They let themselves be manipulated by the serpent, and lost their trust in God, their origin. This caused them to undervalue themselves and led to dramatic consequences, hatred, murder, loss of innocence.

Fortunately, in the Bible, others open up the right path for us: Job shows us an attitude of a faithful creature. Even in the midst of the problems that affect him: the death of his people, the loss of his possessions, he remains upright and trusting. He does not doubt the Creator: “the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised”, he says (Job 1:20-22). We have Mary in her response to the angel who declares herself blessed as she receives the heavy mission of carrying the Messiah. She does not fear, does not shirk, but makes herself available so that the Creator Father may continue his work of salvation.

Monsieur Vincent realised that the poor no longer had a just image of themselves. He gave advice to his friends so that they could approach them with gentleness and delicacy to help them regain their dignity: *“I must not judge a poor peasant man or woman by their appearance or their apparent intelligence, especially since very often they scarcely have the expression or the mind of rational persons, so crude and vulgar they are. But turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people”* (SVP XI, 19, p.26). So we too must be vigilant and help them to regain confidence.

Jesus reminds us that this what simplicity means. He says *“I am gentle, and humble of heart”* to show us the direction to take. It is not a question of sacrificing ourselves, making a big effort, or constraining ourselves, but only of listening to the Father and following step by step where he leads us.

Saint Vincent reminded us of this: *“We should make a great effort to learn the following lesson, also taught by Christ: Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart. We should remember that He Himself said that by gentleness we inherit the earth. If we act on this we will win people over so that they will turn to the Lord. That will not happen if we treat people harshly or sharply. And we should also remember that humility is the route to heaven.”* (SVP XIIIa, 117a Common Rules of the CM, no.6, p.435).

The true humility that we Vincentians cultivate is one of the five stones of the slingshot that David used to defeat the giant Goliath who threatened believers, St Vincent tells us. It will be the weapon that no one will be able to take away from us and that no situation will make us lose. We will know how to respond promptly to the calls that we receive from the Father in our daily lives and we will dare in all simplicity to find solutions to the calls of the poor who knock on our doors.

Never afraid of new challenges, never doubting that if these challenges have been presented to us, the Father will accompany us in accomplishing what he has given birth to in our hearts so that the most vulnerable people regain confidence. From the place that is ours, the place that God has given us, we will help them find their place as God's creatures beloved by the Father, creatures worthy of existence, happy to know that they are heirs to God's plan of love.

In this way, through humility we will rediscover the joy of the Gospel: *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”* (Mt 5:5).