

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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HUMILITY EXALTS

BY

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HUMILITY EXALTS

It has been written that God hates the proud soul, but the humble He loves. The pages of Sacred Scripture warn us repeatedly that he that exalts himself shall be put down, while the lowly and the meek shall inherit the earth. We know that when the Virgin Mary was made Mother of God, she cried that God has raised up the little ones, but the proud of heart grovel in the dust. The broken and humble spirit of the sinner is welcome in the courts of heaven, but the pride of the Pharisee is condemned. Our Divine Saviour, leaving us a message of wisdom and of salvation said: "Learn of me, for I am meek, and humble of heart: And you shall find rest to your souls" (*Matt.* 11:29). And with Him, teaching and example were one. His birth was in the poverty of the stable. Over His youth there is the cloud of obscurity, a worker in a little village of simple folk. When the day came for His manifestation to the world, He did not go to Rome, where dwelt the power and majesty of empire; nor did He journey to Athens, where learned men disputed and debated in their conceit; but He went among the poor, the ignorant, the lowly—despised by men, but great in the clear vision of the Almighty. Some

were shocked that He mingled with the publicans and sinners, but such was His mission. When He gathered about Him faithful followers, not many were great or powerful or learned in the eyes of men.

St. Paul saw this well, when he warned the Corinthians: "See your vocation, brethren, that *there are* not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble: But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong. And the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and things that are not, that he might bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his sight" (*I Cor.* 1:26-29). The shining example of the Savior's humility had burned itself into the heart of Paul. He appeals to brethren through the meekness and lowliness of Christ. His writings are filled with references to the humility of the Cross. Indeed, in his letter to the beloved disciples at Philippi, this was the standard which he left to them: "For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But

emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to death of a cross. For which cause God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names: That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth: And that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father" (*Phil.* 2:5-11). Such then, my friends, is the inspired language of the Holy Book. It teaches us the way in which we should walk, that we have life instead of death, light rather than darkness.

Such also is the lesson of history. Two weeks ago tonight we rejoiced at the news that one of the criminals who led the world into war had fallen. He prided himself in the strength of arms and not in the justice of his cause. For the weak, he had but scorn. To him, violence was a tonic, war a sacrament. In his madness, he imposed upon a gentle and cultured nation the mantle of tyranny. He made Rome, the eternal city, the sacred city, resound with the clash of arms and the hoarse cries for conquest and plunder—and this in the very shadow of the tombs of the Apostles. Strutting and preening him-

self in a mad drama, this dictator formed an unholy alliance with other forces of evil that they might rule the world. They laid their plans without scruple, without pity. But today, in the ashes of their ruined cities, they eat the bitter fruit of pride. God has stricken them with confusion, as of old He did those presumptuous spirits who would raise a tower to the very gates of heaven. What God did not tolerate in the rebellious angels cast into the depths of hell, He surely will not accept from us, who are but the dust of yesterday.

But we do not need to study kings and warriors to learn the value of a humble heart. Our daily lives teach us this lesson. We see about us the selfish, the violent, those who are insolent and conceited. There are many who live for themselves and consider other as tools and instruments for their designs. There are tyrants in the home as well as in the dictator states of Europe and Asia. Cruelty and ruthlessness is not reserved to rulers, nor is viciousness confined to brown-shirted oppressors. Pride of life is found among young and old, rich and poor. In others we can see this and observe its folly. Those who live for themselves are left to themselves. Every man's hand is raised against them. They are alone and unhappy, wretched and miserable men. They may

gain power, but never love. They may attain success, but not lasting achievement. Instinctively we resent them and dislike them, even when we fear them. They have built a hollow temple upon shifting sands.

Today even those without religion acknowledge the worth of this great Christian virtue. There are countless books written which tell us of easy ways to gain success by winning friends. We are shown how to gain power and influence over our fellow men. These writers explain devices which guarantee results, be it in the field of salesmanship or in the broader sphere of human relations. But they warn us that external manners are not enough; the heart must feel what the lips express. And thus, in the language of business and with the trappings of modern technique, they present to us the age-old virtues of humility and charity. Others come to us as psychologists. They write books on child care, on success in marriage, and scores of other topics. Much that they tell us is wise and practical, but little is new to those who have meditated on the life of our Savior or the teachings of St. Paul.

Yet, in spite of these teachings, there is still much to learn. Contentment for pride does not mean acceptance of humility. We may

see the folly of the one, without understanding the wisdom of the other. It is possible to put on a cloak of modesty and reserve as a device to win favor, without a real change of heart. We speak of a sensible pride and a proper conceit, as a middle ground between the braggart and the saint. While we do not countenance worship of self, we smile at those who speak of themselves as weak and sinful. Perhaps we may use the language of reserve, understating our achievements and qualities, but we would be hurt to the quick if others were to agree with our pretended estimate of ourselves. This is the way of acting of the lady and the gentlemen, the language of polite society, something good in itself, much better perhaps than conceit and braggadocio, but still quiet different from the ideal of Christ.

It is precisely this difference that adds to the sickness of modern society.

It is impossible to attain a full measure of justice and charity so long as we have a distorted view of our own selves. Justice means the giving of every man his due. It is the balancing of his rights and ours, the acknowledgment of duty and obligation. But if we start from a false promise of selfishness, we shall invariably stress our rights rather than our duties. Our judgments of others will be

harsh and implacable. We will demand, not give. Our nation will be split into dozens of pressure groups, each seeking its interests, none seeking the welfare of all. Such a nation cannot survive. Justice must be truly impartial, and only a humble man can judge impartially of others. Justice must be tempered by friendliness and toleration and charity, and a proud man is not often kind towards his fellow man. The virtue of charity implies an esteem and love for our neighbor, but we do not esteem those whom we despise. It is only when we realize our own weakness that we can be tolerant towards the frailty of others. Sympathy does not come easily from those in the fullness of physical and moral vigor. Those flushed with success are often harsh towards their fellows broken with failure. The young, who have not known sickness or weakness, demand more than do those from whom the years have taken their toll. Thus we cannot truly deal with others, until we have a correct view of ourselves. Until we learn humility, we shall not be really great.

Many will rebel against this demand. They will assert that they cannot be dishonest with themselves. They cannot deny their virtues. If they are talented in mind, this is an objective fact, proved by their success in studies.

If they have more energy and persistence than their competitors, their achievements will tell the story. They ask: Should a Beethoven pretend that he has no musical ability? Would Napoleon have been justified in saying that he knew nothing of military art? Do we expect a Washington or a Lincoln to act as if they did not possess qualities of leadership? Surely justice demands that we tell the truth. Would not humility be opposed to justice? The answer is: Humility is justice. It is a fair and honest appraisal of ourselves, the good as well as the bad. It would be wrong to deny our talents or pretend to faults which we do not possess. Indeed it would only be a false and dangerous perversion of this virtue to reject opportunities for doing good. It is wrong for an able man to evade responsibility. Our Lord condemned the servant who buried his talent in the ground, instead of using it to the full.

Humility is justice. But it is justice which sees the bad as well as the good. It sees the entire picture, not some limited part. We have abilities, but we also have faults. If it is fair to acknowledge the one, it is only just that we admit the other. We have done evil as well as good. But normally we conceal our failings. If we cannot hide them, then we excuse

them. We blame our weakness on circumstances. We were tired. We happened among bad companions and it was their example which led us astray. Or this is a weakness in our nature. We inherited it and can do nothing about it. We naturally balance this evil against the good we find in ourselves. And not merely the known evil, but the secret thoughts of our heart, the hidden designs which never come to light, the shameful and base projects which we fail to carry out, not through lack of intention, but merely because opportunity did not present itself. Supposing science were to discover a method of penetrating into the innermost thoughts of every man, just as today it locates objects in fog and darkness—were this to happen, how then would we feel towards our fellow man? If every shred of pretense were stripped aside and the naked soul laid bare to every passer-by, would we then raise our head in pride? Once, long ago, that did happen. A group of righteous men brought in a woman, that they might stone her for a crime she had committed. They came to our Savior and asked His opinion. For a long time, He did not speak. He simply stooped and wrote upon the sand. As each of these men saw the writing they realized that a guilty secret of their heart stood revealed by Him Who sees into the inner-

most chambers of the soul. Then He arose and said: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (*John* 8:7). And it is written that they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest. That was justice, and humility is justice.

Again, we should not be too anxious to claim credit for success. Many succeed through chance, when others more deserving fail. Opportunity, education, heredity, all these contribute much to achievement in life, and for these we cannot take any personal credit. It is related that one day St. Philip Neri spied a criminal being led to the gallows and cried out: "There but for the grace of God goes Philip." That was the honest approach. In the eyes of God it is not achievement alone which counts, but rather the right use of the talents and abilities which were given to us. When the final day of reckoning comes, we may find that our prisons have disgorged saints into the courts of heaven, while the proud and the self-righteous look on from afar upon those whom once they despised. Certainly publicans and sinners were the ones who listened to John the Baptist and our Savior. They, not the Pharisees or the teachers of the law, received the kingdom of God. This is the record of history. It should teach us caution in appraising our virtues

and others' faults.

If each of us can learn this lesson in his own heart, then we shall be better prepared to deal with our fellow man. We will be less likely to criticize and more willing to understand and cooperate. Capital will see the viewpoint of labor. The worker will be ready to admit that management has many difficult

problems. All of us will take a more reserved attitude in speaking of government, particularly in view of the complex problems of war. Understanding will breed friendliness and sympathy. Then we shall be ready to march together as one, a great nation, united for victory in this hour of war, and for triumph in the day of peace.

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided gratuitously by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year (and Good Friday) through a number of stations varying from 90 to 107, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting of an address mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers, and of sacred music provided usually by a unit of the Paulist Choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. A current average of 41,000 audience letters a month, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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