

St Bernard of Clairvaux was once asked

What are the three most important aspects of the spiritual life?

His reply: humility, humility, humility

This is because the four cardinal virtues

Prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude

All have this one thing in common

In fact, the three theological virtues

Faith, hope and charity also share this trait

Cardinal in this sense means hinge

It is how all the other virtues are connected

And what connects them is humility

As if humility is the hinge pin

It has been said true humility is not thinking less of yourself

It is thinking of yourself less

One of the greatest sports books I have read personifies this

It is a book that goes beyond sports

I am Third

The autobiography of Gale Sayers

And his special relationship with Brian Piccolo

Sayers says he picked up the saying from his college coach

He saw it on a plaque in his office

When asked what it meant

The coach replied

God is first

My family is second

I am third

That is true humility

Something that is so simple to see

But so difficult to live

We can also see this virtue in the Holy Family

There is a favorite painting of the Holy Family

Mary, Joseph and Jesus

Sitting in a humble house

Mary is doing laundry or sewing clothes

Joseph has taken a break from his work

Various wood working tools are lying about

Jesus is there, leaning against Joseph

With a family dog at their feet

And Jesus is teaching the dog a trick

Normal, everyday human activities

Things families still do today

Mary and Joseph lived a humble life

Making a living

Teaching their son

Doing what all families would have done in their day

Even though she was the mother of the Christ-child

Mary did not have a staff or servants to do her work

Joseph worked with his hands as a carpenter

Simple, humble lives

Living the virtue Sirach writes about

This is not about a false humility

One that seeks to garner favors from humans

Promoting our own reputation

It is about finding favor with God

It is an acknowledgment of the truth

Recognizing that there are some things beyond what we can do

Not going beyond our strength

But at the same time

We don't use that as an excuse to do nothing

We set challenging goals

Not impossible goals

And when we set our goals a bit high

And we fail

It does not mean we stop trying

If I am in my prime, I might desire to be a professional athlete

But if I am 28 and weigh a buck thirty five

Probably not going to be an NFL linebacker

If I am 5'10"

Probably not going to make the NBA

So I strive to do what I can

And then a bit more

In all aspects of life

Spiritual as well as material

We get a lesson on this in our Gospel

Jesus creates for us a dinner scene

We can see everyone coming in

Jockeying for position

Who do I know here?

Who do I want to be seen with?

Who do I want to notice me?

But his plans backfire

He is noticed

But for the wrong reasons

And is asked to take a lower position

All the man's plans come to nothing

He is humbled by being asked to take a lower place

We can imagine the joy in the other's faces

Seeing this person being put in his place

As long as it is not happening to them

They are fine with it

Even here a bit of the ego shining through

So Jesus gives us advice to get this out of our lives

Get out of the ego game

To those invited

Take a lower place

Don't worry about being noticed for the wrong reasons

Don't worry about being in the 'in' group

To those with the ability to host

Don't worry about having the proper guest list

Don't worry if your generosity is not repaid

True generosity does not calculate what I will receive

What Jesus teaches is that everything we have is a gift

It is grace

As St Paul said:

What do you have that you have not received?

If you received it, why do you boast?

St Catherine of Sienna tells of a vision she had

God tells her remember *'I Am, and you are not'*

But we want to reject this

We like to think we are important

We begin to think of ourselves as little gods in our own right

We believe that since we exist

There are things I want

Things I expect

Things I deserve

Go to work building fortified cities around our ego

Building monuments to ourself

Guarding them

Jealous of others

Finding ways to be noticed

Degrading others to build myself up

Focusing on myself

How I look

What others think of me

These things bring misery

But focusing on another

Another person or on God

This brings enjoyment

Jesus teaches us to stop playing the game

Stop feeding the ego

But it has to go to the heart

Reverse psychology does not work in the spiritual life

Living in humility stops the ego game

And you will be truly blessed

Jesus did not only teach this through a parable

He lived it in his life

He is the king of kings

The 2nd person of the Holy Trinity

But he humbled himself to become man

He does not teach us to strive to be like God

When he became man

He lived in poverty and simplicity

When he was invited to a banquet

When he lived, walked and taught in this life

He associated with the lowly

And he has an invitation to a heavenly banquet

An invitation to which none of us could ever respond to in kind

It is simply there

God's generosity

God's invitation

We need only one thing to recognize this and to accept it

A humble heart

Thinking not less of ourself

But thinking of ourself less