

## STATIO CONFERENCE-SEPTEMBER

### **Humility—Acceptance of Reality and Accountability**

by Sister M. Lydia Villegas, OSB

Read this story as if you were reading it for the first time:

Then God said: “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the **earth** and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the **earth** and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a **man** from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. . . (Genesis 2:5-7)

But for **Adam** no suitable helper was found. (Genesis 2:20b)

The footnote for the word “earth” reads “or land” The Hebrew for man (adam) sounds like and may be related to the Hebrew for “ground” (**adamah**). It is also the name **“Adam”**.

Let us look at the word **humility** which is derived from the word **“humus”** which also means **earth**.

**Humility** tells us that we are created in God’s image and that we come from the earth and have been given the breath of life by God Himself. Humility puts us in the right relationship with God. We are His creatures fashioned by Him to share in His life.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:1-6)

The story becomes complete. God shares his glory with someone from the earth. He makes us in his own image. And as the story unfolds we find man rejecting the call to be in relation with God as a creature, as one created by Him. He goes his own way; and so do the people after him. He would like to be like God. But this God wants to continue sharing his life with us. He then sends his own Son who becomes like us in all things except sin. God as it were stoops and assumes our human nature that we may truly become like Him.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in **humility** value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interest but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he **humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!** (Philippians 2:1-11)

Our journey back to God has been outlined by St. Benedict. We return to God through obedience. We need to listen to His Word, make it our own, and live it out.

And living out God’s Word requires that we learn the way of humility. Adam sinned through disobedience and pride. We return to God through obedience and humility. And Jesus shows us the way back to the Father.

This obedience and humility have come to us through witnesses before Christ’s passion and death on the Cross.

1) Mary (Luke 1: 26-38)

Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever: his kingdom will never end.

How will this be since I am a virgin?

The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

**I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.**

2) Joseph (Matthew 1:18-24)

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

When Joseph woke up, **he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.**

3) John the Baptist (John 3:22-30)

Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing and everyone is going to him.

To this John replied, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. **The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.**"

And in our Lord's life—some examples

1) The Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 9-14)

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like the other

people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘**God, have mercy on me, a sinner.**’

**I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.**

2) Come to me all who are weary (Matthew 11:28-30)

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 in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

3) And finally before his death—(John 13:1-17)

Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

“Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” . . .

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. **Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, or is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.**”

We have had many days of recollection, many retreats and seminars. We have read a lot about humility and know Chapter 7 of our Holy Rule. We have had reflections on the Gospels and the Holy Rule. It is best that we go deep into ourselves and discover myself in the depths of my being. What have I put on? What is my life's striving? When I am before my Lord and King, who really am I?

I end these reflections with my favorite verses in the Holy Rule—

**LISTEN carefully, my son, (daughter), to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart.** This is advice from a father who loves you, welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice. The labor of obedience will bring you back to him from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience. This message of mine is for you, then, **if you are ready to give up your own will, once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord.** (Prologue 1-3)

And Chapter 72 which I strive to be faithful to each day and which I know I have been sorely wanting in—

Just as there is a wicked zeal of bitterness which separates from God and leads to hell, so there is a good zeal which separates from evil and leads to God and everlasting life. This, then, is the good zeal which monks must foster with fervent love: ***They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other*** (Rom 12:10), **supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behavior, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another. No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself but instead, what he judges better for someone else. To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers; to God, loving fear; to their abbot, unfeigned and humble love. Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ and may he bring us all together to everlasting life.**

Humility puts me where I rightfully belong in God's plan of salvation. It is a perspective, an orientation that has Christ as the center and goal of one's life, a direction that leads us to loving actions towards one another, a way of life that has as its axis what is good for the other, and a stance where we see everything as God's gift for which we can only be grateful.

### **An Examen of our Life in God and in Community**

1. Is the Lord my first and my last thought each day?
2. Do I recognize Him in the people and events that come my way each day?
3. Am I preoccupied with my role, my responsibility, my position?

4. Do I choose options and modes of behavior because of what others may think and say of me?
5. Can I relate with those younger than myself, with the lay, as my equal?
6. Can I listen to their opinions and suggestions? Even give up mine in favor of theirs when I see wisdom, or find it better than my own?
7. Do I value my life in community giving it the priority it deserves—prayer, common meals, recreation, service, etc.
8. How much of the monastic culture, that we the older Sisters experienced in the past, is alive today? e.g.--
  - a. **attentiveness** to the needs of my neighbor at meals; with the buffet this has changed considerably. Do I partake of the food before me without choosing the better portions? Do I leave the “serving table / dishes” presentable to the eye, out of respect and deference to the next Sister who will get her share?
  - b. **Silence:** Do I move about quietly in my cell? Does my use of the cell phone disturb my neighbor during the times of quiet rest? Do I respect the areas for silence?
  - c. **Mindfulness:** Do I report what needs repair in the common facilities? Am I ready to volunteer service when needed? Do I anticipate the needs of others, especially those of the sick and elderly?
  - d. **Care of the common areas:** Do I leave the lavatories clean for the next user? It would be good to consider my sister as deserving the best. Do I readily clean or make order when the areas are not fit for me and my neighbor? A thought: The other is Christ. Do I have an eye for what needs to be done in the refectory, community room, etc? Or do I wait to be asked? Or just ignore what I see, waiting for the one-in-charge? How generous am I to others?
  - e. **Attitude toward *manualia*:** Am I willing to work with my hands? Even do menial tasks? Or do I right away ask “the girl” to do them for me?  
How do I treat “the girls” who do most of the tasks in the convent that used to be done by us? Do I respect them or treat them like our servants—to be at our beck and call?
  - f. **Accountability:** How wise a steward am I? Do I humbly ask for what I need and readily account for the monies given me?
  - g. **Speech:** Do I use refined language? Am I polite and respectful toward the other?
  - h. **Respect for the other:** Am I sensitive to each Sister in the community? Can I allow the other her space and her time? And be free of judgment?

- i. When I am asked to **render service** and give a NO-answer, does it ever occur to me to ask myself: who will do it now? Is there some other person who can do it? Or do I simply not care anymore and just leave it to the Superior or leader to solve the problem?
  - j. Can I **accept my limitations and own up my mistakes**? In small and big things? Can I tell another Sister, “I am sorry I got your wash by mistake and caused you inconvenience by my keeping it for days in my cabinet.” Or “I was the one who left the faucet running.” Or “I am sorry I did not meet the deadline causing a delay in the giving out of cards.” Or “I overlooked that big mistake. I will be more careful next time.”
  - k. Can I **accept corrections graciously or am I quick to rationalize or justify my behavior**?
  - l. **Forgiveness:** We are wounded healers. Can I **accept God’s love for me as I am and accept his forgiveness? Can I likewise forgive others who have wronged me?** If I am not ready to forgive, **do I ask the Lord daily for the grace to forgive?** Even if I feel I have been the one wronged, **do I take the initiative to reach out in love and friendship?**
  - m. Can I **accept my giftedness and thank God** for it? Or do I claim it as my own?
  - n. Can I **rejoice at another’s success**?
9. How can I grow in the attitude of seeing the best in the other and giving the other what is best?
10. How can I grow in love with God?
11. Am I willing to do untried tasks, new ones, and unfamiliar ones when I know the community is in need of that task or service? Or do I easily say NO because I am afraid to make mistakes?
12. In times of crisis in my ministry or community, do I insist on my rights as if these are owed me?
13. How does my being a monastic influence the judgments and decisions I make in the workplace?
14. In the tasks asked of me that seem an impossibility, do I turn to God for guidance and turn to others for help?
15. Do I use my talents and gifts for the good of others and the upbuilding of the community?
16. Do I accept this community as my community, this ministry with its limitations as the one chosen by God for me?
17. Does this acceptance lead me to greater love of my Sisters, to more understanding and compassion?

18. As Shepherds in our various ministries, do I seek out the least and the lost?  
Do I strive to know each one better and draw out her best for love of God  
and service of others?

**Our communities are, in St. Benedict's words, the school of the Lord's service.**

When we learn the ways of humility in our life with each other, we can be leaven  
in today's world that glorifies--

- wealth and possessions
- position and prestige
- power and control

Before us are two gardens—that of Paradise and that of Gethsemane. Only one  
leads to life everlasting.

### **References**

The Holy Bible—New International Version  
RB 1980--The Rule of St. Benedict in English