

Pastor's Pen: Becoming a Better Catholic

Over the years, I have found prayers that have found a place in my regular spirituality. One of these was written by Cardinal Merry Del Val, who was the Secretary of State for Pope St. Pius X. I would imagine as one of the most powerful men in the Church in his time, it would have been easy for such power to go to his head. I would also imagine that he would see such arrogance as not only a hindrance to how he dutifully executed his office, but as danger to his spiritual life. He wrote a beautiful prayer called "The Litany of Humility." I believe in this litany we can find a wonderful tutorial on becoming a stronger and better Catholic.

It starts with humility

For a person to desire to grow in any aspect of life, it starts with a premise that one can be better at something than they are now. Such an act of honesty spurs us to study, to exercise, to rein in vices and addictions, and to engage in activities that make us better. Without that honesty, the hope of getting better or stronger evaporates. This honesty has another name: humility. Humility is an honesty that allows us to see the truth, both good and bad, of whom we are and who we can be. Humility is what allows us to look at the flat tire around our waist and say, "You know I have made some poor decisions; I can do better than this." Humility drives us to positive growth and perfection.

Cardinal De Val, being a man of faith, would have known this. To grow stronger as a priest, as a diplomat, as a man, and as whatever else he deemed necessary, he would have known that he could not rest on his laurels nor allow others to tempt him toward it. Good leaders become bad leaders quickly when they start buying their own press. Hence, humility also helps us keep a clear vision of who we are.

Recognizing and Identifying

Humility leads us to recognize the needs for growth in our lives and identifying the gifts one possesses to overcome them through the grace of God. Recognition of where we need to change should not dwell in how we got to where we are so much so that we become overwhelmed with our faults. It is simply enough to identify the patterns of behavior that got us to where we are and what patterns need to change to get us to where God would have us be. God has given us tools. They can be internal tools such as will, desire to change, strengths that we build from, and other talents (latent or known) that can spur us on. They can be external tools. The sacramental life of the Church, devotional life, good spiritual reading, and other such avenues can shed light on how we can overcome our deficits, through God's grace, and become what God creates us to be.

Over the course of Lent, I wish to speak to 7 abilities to develop (called virtues) to help us move forward in this newfound vision provided by humility. They are the good habits we can develop to jump from the recognition provided by humility into the life of courage and strength called for by the Catholic life. I suggest using the prayer at the end of this column as a way of keeping yourself open to the call of conversion that Lent calls us to live. Perhaps we can then take the best part of Lent and keep an upward trajectory for our entire lives.

Prayer of Humility

O Jesus! meek and humble of heart, Hear me.
From the desire of being esteemed,
Deliver me, Jesus. (repeat after each line)
From the desire of being loved,
From the desire of being extolled,
From the desire of being honored,
From the desire of being praised,
From the desire of being preferred to others,
From the desire of being consulted,
From the desire of being approved,
From the fear of being humiliated,
From the fear of being despised,
From the fear of suffering rebukes,
From the fear of being calumniated,
From the fear of being forgotten,
From the fear of being ridiculed,
From the fear of being wronged,
From the fear of being suspected,

That others may be loved more than I,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.
----(repeat after each line)

That others may be esteemed more than I,
That, in the opinion of the world,
others may increase and I may decrease,
That others may be chosen and I set aside,
That others may be praised and I unnoticed,
That others may be preferred to me in
everything,
That others may become holier than I, provided
that I may become as holy as I should,