

THE LITANY OF HUMILITY

The litany of humility, for private devotions, is a moving prayer that can bring us closer to Christ. Do you worry constantly about what others think of you? Do you feel empty or frustrated if you're not the center of attention? The litany of humility asks for our Lord's assistance in humbly following in His footsteps and casting aside, or at least offering up to Him, all those nagging doubts and fears that come with our self-centeredness.

Our Lord asks us in Matthew's gospel to learn from Him "for I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt 11:29), as he is described in the first line of this prayer below. We ask in this litany, composed by Rafael Cardinal Merry de Val (1865-1930), the Secretary of State for Pope Saint Pius X, that God fill our hearts and souls with genuine humility, an essential virtue for holiness. After all, as we read in the letter of St. James "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

When the litany of humility is prayed in a private setting by two or more people, the lines given in italics below are the responses to a leader.

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,

The last petition of the litany of humility powerfully suggests what holiness entails: loving God and neighbor *above all else*, putting others' needs before ours. We are not to worry how we "rank" in godliness. Otherwise we might as well be like the Pharisees our Lord scorned who took more delight in the *trappings* of religion, rather than in love of God and neighbor, so that "all their works they do in order to be seen" (Matt 23:5).

In seeking God's help to cast out our sins of pride we are in tune with our Lord's famous Gospel message "He who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt 23:12).

When we talk about pride here, we're not talking about how you feel when your child wins a spelling bee, for example. We're talking about one of the deadliest of sins, the pride which causes haughtiness, jealousy, or anger over slights or insults.

Speaking of insults, Cardinal de Val may very well have had our Lord's Sermon on the Mount in mind when he mentioned the fear of being mistreated in various ways in the litany of humility. Jesus consoles us with the thought that when we are persecuted for His sake we should "rejoice and exult, because your reward is great in heaven" (Matt 5:12).

Jesus Himself gave His life for us in the most poignant example of humility we can imagine! The Creator of the Universe took on our flesh and our sins for our salvation, to be born in a manger and die on a cross between two thieves!

As St. Paul wrote, "he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him" (Phil 2:7-9).

What is also worth noting is that the important link between humility and holiness can be found *throughout scripture*, not just in the New Testament.

For example, our Lord's famous Beatitude "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt 5:5) echoes this verse from the Psalms: "The meek shall inherit the land, and shall delight in abundance of peace" (Psalm 37:11).

As the prophet Micah, for one, put it so well in his book found in the Old Testament: "You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mi 6:8). Hopefully the litany of humility can inspire you on your own sacred and special journey towards heaven!