**Humility: The Lost Virtue**

**Circle of Care – Educational Program**

**Paraphrase of St. Benedict’s Twelve Steps of Humility by Sr. Joan Chittister**

1. Recognize that God is God. (Fear of God in the context of awe and a sense of God’s greatness).
2. Know that God’s will is best for me. (Desire to obey God and keep his commandments).
3. Be willing to receive direction.
4. Endure and don’t grow weary. (Persevere when assigned tasks that are difficult or distasteful).
5. Acknowledge faults. (Accept our limitations).
6. Be content with less than the best. (Be content with life as it is and accept less favorable conditions).
7. Let go and be at peace.
8. Learn from the community.
9. Listen. (Keep silence as part of living a balanced life).
10. Never ridicule.
11. Speak kindly. (Speak with well-chosen words).
12. Be simple and serene. (Be humble in action as well as interiority, that is to go about daily life being honest about one’s own nature before God and not having an inflated opinion of our self).

Parenthesis notations: <https://discoveringprayer.com/4-lessons-from-st-benedict>

**The Rule of St. Benedict**

While St Benedict provides a twelve- step ladder of humility (see above and chapter 7), the Rule comes back to the topic of the need for humility in chapters 61, 62, 63, 64, and 65. These chapters concern themselves with welcoming guests beyond the monastery, visiting priests or monks, the selection process of the abbot, and the responsibilities of the abbot as a steward of souls. In these chapters St. Benedict warns against “arrogance,” “being blinded by vainglory,” “obstinacy,”” being puffed up with the spirit of pride,” “envy, and jealousy” that might “sear the Abbot’s conscience.” He cautions against arrogance/pride because it can cause disruption, tension, rumors, “foster scandals, and excite quarrels in the community.”

To illuminate the St. Benedict’s 12 step ladder of humility, **Bernard of Clairvaux**’s work ***On the Steps of Humility and Pride***, takes St. Benedict’s Ladder and flips it around. Instead of looking at the ascent of humility, he details the corresponding descent of pride:

1. Curiosity about what is not one’s concern
2. Light-minded chatter about trivialities
3. Laughing about nothing
4. Boasting and talking too much
5. Trying to be a special little snowflake
6. Thinking oneself holier than others
7. Presumptuous interference in the affairs of others
8. Self-justification and excuse-making
9. Insincere confession
10. Rebellion against superiors
11. Feeling free to sin
12. Habitual sin

**Bio facts—Bernard of Clairvaux:**

Bernard of Clairvaux, 1090-20 August 1153, was a French abbot and the primary reformer of the Cistercian order. Bernard was instrumental in re-emphasizing the importance of Lectio Divina and contemplation on Scripture within the Cistercian order. Bernard led to the foundation of 163 monasteries in different parts of Europe. At his death they numbered 343.

**Interactive Activity:**

**Step one Self-Reflection:**

Review Bernard of Clairvaux’s ladder of pride and circle those behaviors that resonate with you (“speak to you.”). This is an intuitive, gut response. (Allot about 2m**).**

**Facilitator: ASK** with a show of hands who circled step I, 2, 3, …go down the list and identify how many group members marked a particular step.

At the end, a pattern should emerge. For further discussion, the Facilitator can either choose to select those steps that have the “highest” number for further discussion, or, depending on time, limit the discussion to the top two.

**Step two Group Activity**

If the group is manageable in size, continue with a group discussion

For a larger group (more than 10), either break the group up into three/four participants per small group and remind the group to assign someone to take notes and “present key points of the discussion to the group at large.

**Discussion Questions:**

Reflect on specific ways in which the particular behavior that the group selected based on the participants’ responses impacts:

* + The pastoral care visits
	+ The Community of Hope sense of community
	+ The connection to God
	+ Your own spiritual “wellness”

Based on the discussion and the ladders of St Benedict and Bernard of Clairvaux, we are asked to constantly keep in the forefront the need for *Conversatio Morum*, the willingness to change, a commitment to daily conversion of habits. And as such, we “always begin again.”

**Concluding comment:**

**Esther de Waal’s words provide us with insight and encouragement as we struggle to progress up the ladder of humility:**

The word “humility is derived from the same root as ‘*humus*,’ earth, …it suggests that we should be profoundly earthed, that we should face up to the truth about our human condition. This is a command which does in fact demand enormous strength of purpose. … first, we have to tackle what can both ruin our private life and become a corrosive relationship with others, namely self-will. … Benedict wants us to free ourselves from the possessive self, concerned with self-interest, which so grasps and clutches that it gets in the way of any free and open relationship with God. So, it is the use which we make of our will which is the point at issue. Are we going to use it to serve our own drives and impulses and assert our independence? Or are we going to use it to serve others and make it a means of returning to Christ? That is the challenge.

From *Seeking God: The Way of Saint Benedict*, posted on June 11, 2016—*How Great is the Freedom to Which You Are Called. Saturday Reading: Listening by Esther de Waal.*

**Additional Facilitator Notes**

**Introductory remarks could include the following**

**Humility:** comes from the word “humus” meaning earth as in “remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.” In humility we recognize our common humanity, as well as our common condition

*But to have a heart which is sad because of someone else’s wretchedness you must first recognize your neighbor’s mind in your own and understand from your own experience how you can help him* (Bernard of Clairvaux).

**An interfaith conversation focusing on the value of humility** –November 23, 2016 brought together an interfaith community (rabbi, Orthodox Christian, United Methodist, unitarian, Islamic Center) to discuss the need for humility.

“The panel touched on pride which was described as one of the “deadliest sins.”

Those who attended the interfaith discussion were asked to share their definitions of humility. Some of those perspectives included being able to look past differences in others, and to view people positively. They also talked about experiences where arrogance and insecurity, and even the tone in their own voice, probably stymied humility.”…Humility is about saying little and doing so much more,” said Erich Zamarat, who cited rabbinic saying.

Humility “does not mean negating yourself in making a lot of space for others…”

(*reporter: Steve Ramirez, Las Cruces Sun. News. Published 3:34pm MT November 23, 2016).*

**Group Discussion –Ladder of Pride Bernard of Clairvaux**

The facilitator may want to point out the significance of the downward spiral**:**

**Bernard of Clairvaux’s ladder of pride/of descent brings us with each step of the ladder in a downward spiral where we become**

More self-absorbed

More determined by self -will

More determined to be self-reliant

End result: “we become habitual” in

 I do what I want

 Do so “without thinking”

 Do so with no regard for content, context, or impact of my activities on my spiritual serenity, my emotional and physical well-being, my community spirit (lack thereof).

**Interactive Activity/Group Discussion**

Facilitator might want to point out that the ladder of descent has both immediate, visible, as well as long term invisible effects (thoughts, words, deeds). The goal is to get the group to identify in very specific terms what the consequences are of the behavior. Probe the group if the group has a hard time coming up with specifics.

For example, Clairvaux*, step 6 Thinking oneself holier than others*. --- Henry Nouwen just recently had a post that “it may be more difficult to be *in* the Church without being *of* the Church. Being *of* the church means being so preoccupied by and involved in the many ecclesial affairs and clerical “ins and outs” that we are no longer focused on Jesus. … Being *in* the Church without being *of* it is a great spiritual challenge.

 *Ask the group*: how does that play itself out in this group? (if the group picked that as a topic).

*Another prompt for the group* if they struggle with providing specifics: When we do not get the things we think we deserve, our frustration can lead us to arrange events and relationships in a way that “helps things along” (*self-promotion*). **ASK:** how did you respond or feel when you sensed that someone had an unspoken agenda? How did this impact your perception of that person? Your relationship?

The desire to excel can become the idol of success. **ASK**: What are the costs to your inner spirit when success is your idol?

**More questions:**

How does pride work? Where especially am I weak in it, so that I can become aware of when pride/envy takes a hold of me. =Self Examen =bring it out of the shadows.

**Words of Encouragement**

Climbing the ladder of humility is hard and daunting. When we fall down, over and over again, we may become discouraged, stop our spiritual discipline, change our attitude. It is important to recognize that the Saints are our example of perseverance during the Dark Night of the Soul. Be patient, God is with you.

Henry Nouwen: “Jesus says: Not a hair of your head will be lost. Your perseverance will win you your lives (Luke 21:18-19) …We can only keep it together when we believe that God holds us together…. When we keep living a spiritual life, we have nothing to be afraid of.”

**Other commentators:**

**St Gregory the Great** and **St Thomas Aquinas** after him, considered pride to be “*the queen of all vices.”*

**Fr. Michael Casey in “Living in the Truth,**” which addresses Benedict’s teaching on humility, cites Bernard of Clairvaux’s teaching that humility is truth; within oneself, in one’s relations with others, and with regard to God and pride is radical falsehood (the complete opposite of humility. A very different way to look at truth and pride than in modern times.

One branch **of Buddhism, The Mahayana Tradition identifies 7 types of arrogance**

Among them, *False or anticipatory arrogance or arrogance of showing off*: is a puffed-up mind that feels I have attained some quality that I have not actually attained or not yet attained; or thinking one has achievements when one has achieved nothing.

*Modest arrogance or arrogance of thinking small* is a puffed-up mind that feels that I am just a little bit inferior compared to someone vastly superior to myself in some quality, but still superior to almost everyone else.

**Islam considers pride a “dangerous flaw”**

*He who has in his heart the weight of an atom of pride shall not enter paradise. (Muslim)*

*Pride deprives the prideful person from Paradise because it prevents him from acquiring the qualities of the believers, for he cannot like for the believers that which he likes for himself, nor can he be humble, or avoid animosity, envy, or wrath, or restrain his anger, or accept good advice, or refrain from despising and backbiting people. In short, he is subject to blameworthy morals.*

**Bible**

**Proverbs 16:18**

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

**Leviticus 26:19**

I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and ground beneath you like bronze.

**Psalm 10:4**

In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.

**YET--- pride is also positive**

**Psalm 47:4**

He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loved.