

Day 11 (Week 2, Day 3): Dispositions Part II – Purity of Intention and Humility.

Today we hear from Bill Gates on the importance of Purity of Intention.

First, let's open in prayer.

Come Holy Spirit, make of me a fitting dwelling place for the Lord.

Yesterday we discussed the importance of Faith. In our spiritual life this our belief in God and trust in His plan for us in this life and His desire for us to spend eternity with Him in Heaven.

Now, every human endeavor requires focus. Focus is probably the single greatest indicator of the degree of success someone will have in achieving a goal. A popular story in the business world is that Bill Gates and Warren Buffett were once at dinner at the home of Bill Gate's parents. During the evening the parents asked each of them to each write on a piece of paper the single most important trait for success. One wonders what prompted Bill's parents to play this particular "get to know you" game. But as the story goes, when they showed their answers, each had written "focus". This is true for our analogy of trekking through a jungle to reach that far-off peak. If we lose our focus and start taking side trips because we see an interesting site we not only delay our journey we risk something happening that will completely prevent us from continuing on and achieving our goal.

Focus in the spiritual realm is associated with purity of mind and purity of intention (we address purity of mind next week, as part of dealing with distractions). Our time in prayer can't be a self-centered activity; our focus needs to be turned from self to God. Here we can think of Peter and the disciples on the stormy sea. Peter gets out of the boat to walk over the water to Jesus. So long as he looked at the Lord he walked on the water. When he turned his gaze from Jesus to the surging sea his thoughts turned to his danger and fear and he sank. This is the subtle distinction between focus and faith. Faith comes first (which is why it is our first disposition). We start with belief in God. Peter believed in Jesus. Once we establish our faith we have to keep that faith at the forefront of our intellect and will. *That* is spiritual focus and that is purity of intention. When Peter lost his focus on the Lord he began to focus on the *stormy* sea, and then came the fear (the great enemy of faith).

So our focus must turn again and again to God - we pray to please God and grow closer to Him. To have this focus, to be single-minded in our love for God and doing His will in all things, is to act with purity of intention. If we love God purely, we won't be troubled or discouraged if it doesn't "feel" like mental prayer isn't working. "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see the face of God." When nothing distracts us from God we start to see His face in everything.

We also must guard against praying to God as a technique to get good things from Him: "I have to pray today so that God will bless me." Putting it in the context of human relationships, it would indeed be an unhealthy marriage or friendship if we only spend time with that person so that we'll get something from them. This aspect of purity of intention can be trickier than it seems. The enemy is very crafty at slipping in the idea that "if I pray, good things will happen." This again is the heresy of Pelagianism, which sprang up around this concept. It is true that a life of prayer will transform us, and that can only lead to greater happiness in this life. But the catch is that the transformation we hope for depends a great deal on the openness of our hearts to be transformed, and that depends on the purity of our

intention (that we come to prayer out of love for God, not love of self). As the saying goes – we need to cultivate a love for the gift-giver, not the gifts.

Purity then is an act of intellect and will. Here the adage of “fake it until you make it” sort of applies. We’re not really “faking it” – but we do have to take command of our emotions. We are naturally self-absorbed and come to prayer wanting God to give us something – we have to force ourselves to put that aside and pray for the grace to desire God for His own sake, and then gratefully accept the gifts God desires to give us, and gratefully accept if He doesn’t seem to be giving us the gift we thought we wanted. Call to mind that you are praying to God who created you, who knows you better than you know yourself and who showers you with all good things. Make it an act of will, an act of gratitude, an act of self-sacrifice, to bring yourself back to this intention again and again and again.

Purity of intention goes hand-in-hand with the virtue of Humility. Humility comes from the Latin word “humus” – or earth. Humble people are grounded, close to their roots, close to *reality*. Humility is also related to meekness. A meek person is perfectly who they are, no more and no less. A meek person does not know false modesty. Jesus casting the money changers out of the temple was meekness in action every bit as much as Jesus washing His apostles’ feet; because it was Jesus being perfectly himself and perfectly aligned with the will of the Father in each situation. Even in righteous anger, Jesus was *grounded* in doing the will of His Father. That is humility.

Purity of intention not only helps us focus on God, it helps us see ourselves for who we are and remain grounded; remain humble. These virtues work in perfect harmony (as all virtues do). Humble people recognize their lowliness and so they trust not in themselves but in God, which is purity of intention.

St. Teresa of Avila tells us “The whole edifice of prayer is founded upon humility”. And from 1 Peter 5:5 “God opposes the proud, but gives Grace to the humble.”

With that, St. Peter brings us to the flip side of humility - “pride”. Just as all of the virtues are wrapped up in love, so too all of the deadly sins have their root in pride. In pride we place ourselves above God and from that lofty position we give ourselves permission to act on whatever sinful impulses come our way. Oh, to be sure we find ways to justify them, we employ situational ethics and every other trick in the book – merely to distract ourselves from the pricking of our conscience that tells us we are defying God.

Humility is the virtue that counteracts pride, which is why humility is the *queen of virtues* (it is no surprise that Mary, Queen of Heaven, is most known for her humility!) We must pray for and practice humility. Fr. Garrigou-LaGrange gives us two methods for practicing humility:

1. “The remedy for pride is to tell ourselves that of ourselves we are not.” It is only by the gift of God that we exist at all, let alone that we experience any form of goodness in this life. “And if grace is in us it is because Jesus Christ redeemed us by His blood.”
2. “The remedy for pride is also to tell ourselves that there is in us something inferior to nothingness itself: the disorder of sin and its effects.” Without the redemption purchased for us by Christ, we are worse than nothing, we deserve and are destined for pain and suffering.

That's strong medicine, but pride is a deadly disease and it can't be trifled with. Pride has a way of concealing itself. How else to practice humility? The *Imitation of Christ* (by Thomas a Kempis) gives some concrete examples:

1. A lowly and simple man who serves God is better than a learned and accomplished man who doesn't.
2. Love to be unknown and esteemed as nothing. Do away with all ambition. To the extent that worldly success or admiration comes to you, count it all as to God's glory.
3. If you see someone else do something wrong and sinful do not consider yourself any better. We are all frail and never no when we might slip into sin ourselves. See no one as less frail than yourself.
4. Be not ashamed to wait on others for the love of Jesus Christ, and to be looked upon as poor in this world.
5. Trust not in your own knowledge, but in the grace of God.
6. Continual peace dwells with the humble, but in the heart of the proud is frequent envy and indignation

The first four are self-explanatory but profit from reflection in silent prayer. Number five reminds us to always check our own thinking and motives. Obviously, we're called on to utilize our knowledge to move through each day, but the warning hinges on the word "trust". We engage our intellect and think for ourselves, but we should always be invoking the Holy Spirit and our guardian angel to guard our thoughts. And we should always be wary of our own failings and thus seek to stay close to God in all that we do.

Item six gets to the heart of discernment. We can judge how we're doing by the fruits that grow in our soul; the fruits of the Holy Spirit. This is the guidepost *par excellence* because here there can be no forgery. Only God can give true interior peace. Pride yields only interior conflict such as envy ("why is so-and-so getting the promotion?") and indignation ("why do I have to do *this*, it's a waste of my abilities!"). True interior peace, even amidst trials, comes from God alone.

We see that our dispositions build on one another. This is because these dispositions are, in fact, virtues; and virtues always rise and fall together. None of us are perfectly pure or perfectly humble. And we may, in fact, have a long way to go. Be not discouraged! Truly humble people are never discouraged because they trust in God, not themselves. We must pray to God for these graces and exercise our faith and trust in God and that He will grant us continued increase in purity and humility and any other virtues we require to progress in prayer and holiness. God's always listening, always waiting to shower us with grace. We've but to spend a little quiet time with Him and ask!

Let's close in prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, help me to become ever more aware of your nearness and your love for me. Amen.



Pearls from Day 11: Dispositions Part II – Purity of Intention and Humility.

Purity

Focus is an important mindset for any human endeavor.

Focus in the spiritual realm is associated with purity of mind and purity of intention. Once we establish our faith, we have to keep that faith at the forefront of our intellect and will. That is spiritual focus and that is purity of intention.

If we love God purely, we won't be troubled or discouraged if it doesn't "feel" like mental prayer isn't working. "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see the face of God."

We pray not to find self-fulfillment or self-satisfaction, but to please God. We must cultivate a love for the gift-giver, not the gifts.

Purity is an act of will. Even though we can't love God purely we should aspire to, and aim for it and practice it as well as we can and with the trust that God will purify us.

Humility

Purity of intention goes hand-in-hand with the virtue of Humility. Humility comes from the Latin word "humus" – or earth. Humble people are grounded, close to their roots, close to *reality*.

St. Teresa of Avila – "The whole edifice of prayer is founded upon humility". 1 Peter 5:5 "God opposes the proud, but gives Grace to the humble."

Humility is the virtue that counteracts pride, which is why humility is the *queen of virtues* (it is no surprise that Mary, Queen of Heaven, is most known for her humility!)

Humble people don't carry on about their wretchedness – they consider it a stroke of luck, since it gives God a chance to show how merciful he is.

It is very difficult for us to accept that we are so poor (spiritually); that is why people naturally tend to avoid silence.

Humble people are never discouraged because they trust not in themselves but in God.