

The Poverty that Enriches

On the Virtue of Humility.

By Bishop Alexander (Mileant)

Translated by Fr. Sergiy Kisselev

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Introduction.

A story. Igor grew up as a meek and fearsome boy. He didn't do well in elementary school. In order to help him counter his indecision, his parents started telling him: "Son, don't forget that you are the most clever and gifted boy of all. You can achieve anything; just have faith in yourself and you'll do it!"

A "precious" piece of advice! Igor became successful with his studies and was noted for his merits. In time, he was one of the top pupils at school. His previous meekness and indecisiveness were replaced with self-assuredness.

Success followed him from high school to university. He was the center of attention everywhere. His superiors made an example of him to everyone, and all of his friends would turn to him for advice.

Very soon Igor came to favor always being number one and the soul of every company. He was always eager to give advice and deal with his friends' problems.

He had hardly gotten his degree when he was offered a job with a major chemical company. He was working in a research department. Because of the competition with other companies, his boss wanted him to publish the results of his research in scientific papers. His name came to be well-known in the scientific community.

Under constant pressure to pen something new, he started little by little to steal material from other people's works that were not so well known. His authorities were happy with his work and gave him fast promotion.

Once, as he was about to come up with another article, he decided to make good use of the results of a little-known treatise. He published them in his paper, concealing the true source. When the article was published, the author of the research recognized his work and issued a protest. Igor in turn questioned the latter's authorship, arguing that it was he who had produced the new results. It came to an ugly dispute between him and the real author.

Igor's company was forced to assign an independent board to investigate the cause. It didn't take the latter too long to determine the fake. When this was brought to light, all the other of Igor's works were examined more carefully and it became clear that it was not the only time he had been dishonest. It was a large-scale scandal. Igor was obliged not just to quit his job, but forget about any authorship in the future. He was discredited for good in the scientific community.

This professional failure had a further negative effect on his family problems. His wife had long complained about Igor's tyrannical and harsh character. As much as he had been light-hearted and charming before, she would say, as the years went by, he became all the more intolerant and sarcastic. He would not tolerate a single controversy. He argued back at any of her proposals. He never missed a chance to humiliate her even in their children's presence. In the end, she obtained a divorce from him and left with the children...

Such was the tragic end that the career of this intelligent and gifted scientist had to see. In the spiritual aspect, it was only pride that had caused the tragedy. The vain feeling of self-assuredness that his parents had instilled in him took him higher and higher until it thrust him down to the earth below.

This paper is intended to open up the causes and the way that lead to pride; we will also try to show the benefits of humility, which is the basis of all virtue. In the appendix we will give some stories and Patristic sayings to prove this point.

The essence of humility.

The Holy Scripture teaches that humility is the **essential virtue**, without which it is impossible to bear any good fruit at all. Our Lord Jesus Christ began His Sermon on the Mount with a call to humility, saying: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:3). As the common poor realize they are in need of everything, so does the one poor in spirit see himself as imperfect and in need of divine assistance. Being conscious of this, in turn, attracts God's mercy, which makes him abundantly rich.

Unfortunately, most "worldly" people underestimate and even despise the virtue of humility. They tend to think that while preaching humility, Christianity is degrading the human person and obliterating one's natural feeling of dignity. Humility, they say, deprives one of an active attitude in life, extinguishes all initiative and nurtures a servile mindset. Such an erroneous notion of humility is only rooted in a lack of spiritual knowledge.

The essence of humility is best illustrated in the Gospel. Let's take the example of the healing of the Roman centurion's servant. In one of His visits to Capernaum, Jesus Christ was approached by a Roman centurion (an officer in modern terms), who had the following request: "*Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented,*" to which the Saviour, Who never declined anyone's wish, promised that He would visit his home and heal the servant. Every believing person would have rejoiced at such a promise. But the centurion's reaction was far from average: "*Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*" The centurion's profound faith and humility moved the Lord to such an extent that not only did He immediately heal his servant, but also made him an example for others, saying: "*I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel*" (Matthew 8:6-13).

Having heard of the numerous healings that the Saviour had performed, the centurion acquired an intense faith in His almightiness. Without denigrating his dignity in any way, he realized, at the same time, that he was **unworthy to demand** any kind of special attention toward his person, all the more so being a pagan and a foreigner. He also remembered that if he, being a common man, is unquestionably obeyed by his minors, so much the more everything will obey the will of the One sent by God.

The acknowledgement of the **divine almightiness**, on the one hand, and of one's **imperfection**, on the other, are the basis of the attitude which is called humility.

When man, led by a deep faith, encounters the Creator's infinite power, he cannot help perceiving his smallness and weakness, seeing himself as a tiny insect on the shore of a boundless ocean. This is why in the presence of God humility is but the most natural feeling. Vanity and pride can only exist in the one who, being removed far from God, is comparing himself to other minute creatures like himself.

Sound faith, according to the word of the Saviour, is capable of *moving mountains* (Matthew 17:20) — not due to some kind of supernatural power that comes along with such faith, as certain sectarians will teach, but because it is capable of **attracting the divine power** — and the latter can do the impossible. For this reason all known examples of a firm and wonder-working faith are, at the same time, examples of a profound humility: the woman suffering from hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-28), the mother from Canaan (Matthew 15:22-28), and many others. The stronger one's faith is, the more he is humble; and vice versa, a proud person cannot possess a profound faith, being all absorbed in one's self. Being spiritually

weak, he is therefore unquiet and easily scared, although he might do his best in order to conceal it.

Spiritual and lay literature alike have known many examples of great and gifted personalities. Many gifted people realized that they were only too far from the measure of perfection or knowledge that they were capable of achieving. Knowing this did not, to the least extent, make them feeble or low-spirited. On the contrary, it gave them more incentive to pursue excellence. To think that humility kills one's initiative, giving him an inert and servile disposition, is to miss the essence of Christianity. The latter's decisive trait is that it calls the man to perfection by way of ascension from the present state, which is damaged by sin, to a likeness of God, as is said: "*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*" (Matthew 5:48). The self-sufficient proud man is in fact the most wretched one, because he is so blind he cannot even perceive his misery (Revelation 3:17).

Finally, the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Who had descended from the skies, the word of Whom was the immediate law for the whole of nature and for the immaterial spirits as well, Who brought the dead back to life, is, at the same time, the greatest example of humility. Who could ever be higher than Him — the Creator of everything visible and invisible alike? And yet He was always the example of obedience towards His earthly "parents," He was obedient towards the lay authorities, He paid taxes, and He meekly forgave His enemies. Striving towards humility, we are doing so in the steps of our Saviour, Who left us His commandment: "*Take My yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls*" (Matthew 11:29).

The Elder Siluan wrote: "When the soul sees the Lord in the Holy Spirit, how much He is meek and humble, then she becomes humble herself. It is a special state that no one is able to describe, since it is only known by experience in the Holy Spirit."

According to the holy Abba Dorotheos, there exist two types of humility: "The initial humility consists of considering one's neighbour more clever and better than oneself... The other kind consists in that one should attribute all his accomplishments and benefits to God and not to himself — this is the perfect humility of the saints. It is found naturally within the soul due to the fulfilment of God's commandments. The branches of a tree that have a lot of fruit hanging on them bow downwards. A branch devoid of fruit is stretching right up. There are also trees that bear no fruit while their branches grow straight up, but as soon as someone, by tying a stone to the branch, bows it down, then it will start bearing fruit. So does the soul, when it humbles itself, become fruitful, and the more it bears the fruit of good deeds, the more does it humble itself. The saints give us the same example: the more they got close to God, the more they saw themselves as sinful and unworthy."

Thus, humility is the most precious virtue without which it is impossible to achieve anything righteous. The holy John of the Ladder says: "If pride has turned some of the angels into demons, than there is no doubt that humility can make angels out of demons. Therefore, have courage, ye the fallen, placing your hope in God!"

The "black hole" of pride.

Pride — this most horrid of all spiritual diseases — is preceded by an entire range of similar illnesses. Among them we find egoism, vanity, haughtiness, swagger, hypocrisy, boasting... They are all the result of just one main spiritual illness: an unhealthy "**self-centeredness**."

In the course of its growth, pride is always preceded by vanity. The difference between vanity and pride is the same as between an adolescent and a full-grown man. The Holy Fathers called pride "insane," because one who is sick with it is saying and doing a lot of insane things, while being wholly convinced of his righteousness and wisdom. Pride can also be compared with **hallucination** and **blindness**.

The deadliness of this awful disease is asserted by its predecessor and "father" — the devil, who instead of a brilliant *Archangel* turned into a fearful *Dragon* (Gen.3:1, Rev. 12:3-9). How many times in the history of mankind, in his absurd confrontation against God, was he defeated; how many times the incarnate Son of God revealed his weakness (Matthew 12:29, 8:31). Even in his very "underground" realm (in hell) the Son of God, having come down there, slew the arrogant Satan, tying him up and depriving him of every power over mankind (Rev. 20:2-3). With the power of the cross even small children can chase away this proud one, but the latter does not want to acknowledge that a war against the Creator is senseless. "My dear, stop making fun of yourself," — was Grandpa Krylow's advice to the tiny dog who was barking at an elephant. Having once been the wisest among the angels, he should understand that God is almighty, while he is really nothing; that with his evil doings he is driving himself all the deeper to the bottom of the fiery gehenna. On the other hand, seeing the mercy that God exercises towards even the greatest sinners, he can still repent and find peace with his Creator. But no! — go his spiteful thoughts: "To degrade myself and to acknowledge my defeat — never! I would rather perish forever than give way! Even if there's few time left for me, I'll succeed in destroying some others along with me..." Such is the "logic" of this proud among the proud: it is insane by all measures — both earthly and celestial! Construction is always difficult, while destruction is easy for everyone.

The only gift he is really endowed with is deceit: he is lying, slandering, pretending and confusing the naive without tiring. And thousandfold wretched are those who might believe him!

This is what Saint Anthony the Great said concerning this: "The devil, who for his pride lost his heavenly position, with all his power is trying to lure but everyone into a fall... by the same way that he has fallen, e.g. through pride and love for vain glory... Many genuinely great ascetics have carried the burden of a virtuous life, but have destroyed themselves through recklessness. The same might happen to you, if, for example, getting tired of ascetic labors, you start thinking that you are in possession of the virtues. Because this is already the very fall into this devilish disease (self-esteem), when you start to think that you are close to God and abide in light, while in reality you are still in the dark. What was the other reason for our Lord Jesus Christ to lay aside His garments, gird Himself with a towel and wash the disciples' feet than to teach humility unto us? Yes — it was a lesson of humility."

How does one fall ill with pride?

Man has a natural disposition towards good. Examples of virtue and instances of sincere love attract the approval of all. A child is pleased when his father encourages him for his success and tries to do what is right with more vigor.

Encouragement has always been an important means of upbringing. But, as many aspects in our spoiled nature stray away from the purpose assigned to them by the Creator, so can the thirst of approval for its own sake distract one away from the right path. In gaining praise, a person can undertake great feats — not for their own sake, but, as might be said, for "export," that is, for the sake of the impression they will produce with others. Such a disposition leads to hypocrisy. The feeling which is pushing one to try to look better than he is in fact is called vanity.

"The sun shines upon everyone indiscriminately, and vanity rejoices in every virtue, — whites St. John of the Ladder, — and the more we are successful, the more food we give to vanity. I am vain when I am fasting; and when I am concealing my fasting not to reveal my labors, I am vain because of my wisdom. When I am well-dressed, I am vain because of my looks, but when I am haggard, I am all the more vain with my supposed humility. When I am about to speak I am vain, when I am silent I am vain again. In whichever way this thorn might be thrown, it will always land with one of its tips pointing upwards."

According to St. John Cassian the Roman, "there are two kinds of pride: the first is the one that infects people of an exalted spiritual life, and the second is fighting the beginners and the carnal ones. And although both kinds lead to a pernicious arrogance in regard of God and one's neighbor, the first one is direct effrontery against God, while the second has to do with people."

Furthemore, anyone who is sinning of his own will is void of humility, since he is putting his own will over the will of God.

As has already been said, pride is conceived from self-assuredness linked with an excessive appreciation of everything which is "mine" and a defiance of all that is "not mine." It is the source of lies and hypocrisy, of unseemliness, rivalry, wrath, cruelty and a multitude of crimes. Pride is a refuse to receive God's assistance, although it is the proud one who has the greatest need of the Saviour, since his disease cannot be cured but with particular Divine help.

Let us track the symptoms and the course of this disease more closely. We have done this in part in the story about Igor. When a vain person is taking part in an enterprise of some kind, he is always trying to prove his superiority.

It is good fortune for someone inclined towards vanity when he is forced, by an external factor of some kind, to switch away from himself to others — his bride or his family, when he is upset with some trouble. Or an acquaintance with spiritual people will lead him along the path of religion, and, attracted with the beauty of virtue, he will perceive his inner poverty and yearn for divine help. But if such a thing does not happen, his vanity will be growing even further.

Vanity will nurture the desire to instruct and to command. He will tyrannize others' wills, trying to dominate their attention, time and resources. He will become aggressive and uncompromising. His business alone is what really matters — forget the others'. He is ready to take up anything and interfere with everyone. At the same time he is often the center of any company, jolly, a story-teller and a blithe joker.

Saint John Cassian the Roman cites the following symptoms of pride: "In conversation — too loud, in silence — sullen, in joy — loud laughter, in sorrow — excessive mourning, in answering — insolence, in serious conversation — heedlessness, because words are uttered without the participation of the heart.

Carnal pride is not acquainted with patience, is alien to love, brave in making insults, low-spirited in tolerating an offence, slow for obedience, unless the latter be preceded with its own will; not bowing to advice, incapable of denying its pleasures, stubborn in obeying others, always wanting to maintain its opinion, never willing to give in. Thus, having become inept to receive salvific advice, carnal pride is putting more trust in its own opinion than in the advice of experienced elders."

With time, the mood of the vain person gets worse. Upset with everything but his own improvement, he either does not notice his own faults or finds excuses for himself. At the same time he makes too much of his knowledge, his experience or his capabilities. Thirsting for his superiority to be recognized, he bitterly reacts to any dissent or criticism. In a discussion, he takes any independent opinion as a personal challenge. Being so aggressive, he naturally has to face a counter-reaction; thus, his annoyance and stubbornness grow even more. He is convinced that everyone is his jealous enemy. His conflicts with others become more acute as he becomes all the more self-centered. But so far he recognizes higher authority and obeys God.

In the illness' final stages, his soul becomes darker and colder, disdain and anger come to dwell there. His mind is obscured, he's no longer capable to discern between good and evil, since it is replaced with "mine" and "others'." He is all the more tired of the stupidity of his seniors; it is all the more difficult for him to recognize any authority. It is must for him to prove his superiority. Thus he is hurt when the other one is right. Any outside success is an insult.

Sometimes this strife for self-assertion is directed towards material gaining, career-making, social or political activity, sometimes, when the proud one has some talent, towards art. Then, thanks to his perseverance, he may achieve success. But such victories do not serve the good of others, but, rather, cause rivalry and decay.

When he thinks that no one has the right esteem for him, but persecutes him and tries to do him harm, this is a symptom of persecution mania. This, along with the mania of greatness, is a severe mental illness, caused by vanity.

At last, as the last step, the proud one turns away from God. Earlier, he sinned because of his weakness. Now he justifies his passions and regards sin as lawful. Being sincerely convinced of his overall superiority, he is sure that he will be able to get along in life without external assistance. But, in the depth of his heart, there comes to dwell unending darkness and infinite loneliness. He is heading into a "black hole" from which he will never be able to come back. God could save him, but the proud one has turned away from Him.

Pride of religious people.

When pride affects the soul of a religious person, then the latter becomes bold enough to act as a judge of the faith and the Church. "I don't believe in this and I don't recognize that; I find this superfluous and that unnecessary, and that one is strange or funny..." Another manifestation of such a pride is the desire to accuse and teach others. At the same time, the instructions of others are considered dull and obvious.

Hearing about the saints, the self-contented sectarian will say: "Why should I pray to them? They are the same kind of people as others; it is enough to turn to God alone." He is forgetting that the Lord Jesus Christ helped people many times on the

request of their relatives and friends (John 4:46-53, Matt.15:21-28, Mark 2:2-12, Matt.8:5-13, 1 John 5:14). He thus encourages us to love and take care of each other. The saints are our "elder brothers" who intercede before God on our part (Rev. 5:8).

The pride of a religious person is also obvious when one does not realize his sins, and when one is taken over with pharisaic self-esteem. It is interesting to note that it can take on the most diverse and controversial forms, for example:

- The type of the Pharisee — a connoisseur of church law, a zealot of tradition, a fighter for the purity of the faith,
- The "reformer" type — an innovator, the enemy of "superstition,"
- The type of the *Sadducee* — a career-maker,
- The false *starets* (a false prophet),
- The self-enchanted preacher,
- The type of an ascetic who is thinks highly of his holiness, or a self-proclaimed starets,
- The aggressive sectarian or self-assigned "prophet."

St. John Cassian makes the following summary of pride's fatal effects: "There is no other passion that would devastate virtue and deprive man of holiness as pride. This passion, like an infection of some kind, afflicts the whole person with a deadly infirmity and attempts to drive even those on the top of virtue into demise. Other passions have their borders and each of them confronts mostly one of the virtues. Thus, gluttony is opposed to temperance, lust stains chastity, wrath chases away patience. So that, if someone is defeated by one of the passions, he is not at all alien to other virtues. But this passion, when it gains control over the soul, deprives one of the shield of humility, and then the whole "city of the soul" is demolished to the bottom. Having denigrated and mixed with soil the tall walls of holiness, it bereaves the soul of every evidence of freedom. And the more pride takes over the soul, the more it submits it to the yoke of slavery, divesting it of all the beauty of virtue in the most cruel manner."

How does one, then, confront pride and evade it, while it is so apt to find a way into one's heart? — The answer is found in the question itself — through humility and obedience. Obedience to one's loved ones, to relatives, to the obvious truth, to everything good to be found inside and outside of us. Obedience to the Law of God, to the Church, to its canons, its commandments, its Mysteries.

Fortunately enough for us, we lack no daily circumstances to demonstrate how much constrained and inconsequential our nature is. We thus do not have any real ground to be proud. A trivial virus in our organism is enough to produce a fatal illness. If we exceed some of our acquaintances by our gifts, there are always those who will exceed us, in turn. Gaining in one sphere, we are losing in another.

The Fruit of Humility.

Humility, being the natural state of the soul, places one in the right position as related to God, oneself and one's neighbour. It thus installs peace among people, serving to improve the family and the society.

Indeed,

1. A humble person realizes **his drawbacks** and **misdeeds**; that is why he, instead of persisting in them, as the proud do, repents of them and strives to **improve**. At the same time, aware of God's power, the humble man is respectful of His will and has awe as not to violate His commandments. If all people were humble, we would be living in the happiest society imaginable. It would be free of robbery, rape, deceit, insults... It would be paradise on Earth.
2. As a tender and obedient child is towards his parents, the same is a humble person towards the Heavenly Father. That is why God loves the humble and gives them overall assistance, as He said Himself: "*I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a contrite and a humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones*" (Isaiah 57:15). And the ancient wise man noted, *there are many who are exalted and powerful, but it is to the humble that mysteries are revealed* (Syr.3:19-20). *The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such that be of a contrite spirit* (Ps.33:18). On the contrary, God turns away from the self-reliant and proud, as is said: "*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*" (James 4:6). If the Almighty is against the proud one, than all the latter's efforts are in vain. The Holy Fathers liken pride to a copper wall erected between man and God: it cannot be penetrated by any light, grace or any help from above. For that reason, the proud person is the wretched among the wretched.
3. Humility lends one a realistic view of his powers and capabilities. While the self-reliant often endeavours that which is far beyond his scope and therefore comes to ruin, the humble, calling upon God's help, receives wisdom and strength from Him. Without unnecessary advertising, he will often do much more than he would by himself.
4. Humility, by instilling peace in the soul, is an instrument to avoid rivalry and quarrels: "*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls*" (Matt.11:29). The righteous father John of Kronstadt teaches us: "*Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good*" (Rom.12:21). When someone is rude to you, when you are tempted, when they are breathing into your face with contempt and anger, do not return it in kind, but be silent, meek and benign, respectful and loving towards those who misbehave in front of you. For if you are shaken and start returning their words without peace, if you argue back with rudeness and disdain, it means you are overcome with evil and you should justly apply to yourself the saying: "*Physician, heal thyself,*" or: "*Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in your own eye?... First cast out the beam that is in thine own eye*" (Luke 4:23, Matt. 7:3-5)... Have pity with the one who has insulted you, because he is so easily conquered with his passions and has an ailing soul. The more he is rude and easily shaken, the more love you should show towards him. This way you will easily overcome him. Good is always stronger than evil and therefore more victorious. Remember, too, that all of us are very weak and easily overcome with passions. Because of this, be meek and condescending towards those who sin

against you. You have the same illness as your brother. Forgive your debtors so that your heavenly Father might forgive you your debts."

5. Humility gives ones a modest, silent and well-wishing disposition. Indeed, if one realizes that all the perfections of human nature are very conditional, how will he treat others find-faultily and in a hostile manner? God exalted the repentant publican above the "righteous" Pharisee, as we see in the Gospel proverb (Luke 18:10-14). While the proud one is anxious to prove his superiority to everyone, and is therefore agitated and aggressive, the humble person deals with the others with understanding and benevolence. This, in turn, helps to establish a peaceful and friendly climate both in the family and in the society as a whole.
6. Humility, which carries us to God, is the inevitable condition for spiritual growth. "*For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*" (Luke 14:11). St. Isaac the Syrian wrote: "As an antidote to subtle vanity, confess sincerely your weakness and ignorance to God when you pray, so that you are not abandoned by God and fall prey to unclean passions."
7. By unanimous evidence from the Holy Fathers, it is not so much one's holiness as one's humility that **works wonders**. (There is the well-known story of the prostitute who, with her humble prayer, brought a dead child back to life).

The following is a summary of the respective qualities of humility and pride, and of the corresponding states of the soul.

The two directions of one's will.

Humility:	Pride:
<p><i>Related virtues:</i> Modesty, meekness, patience, compassion, the ability to understand, to yield and to forgive, tactfulness, generosity, courage in acknowledging one's faults, repentance, trust in God, the incentive to improve, respect for another's opinion, respect for another person.</p>	<p><i>Imaginary advantages:</i> A strong-willed character, of the "Byron" type, purposefulness, strong motivation, born to lead on and to command, brave, courageous, knowing one's value, straight, firm... He looks like it, but take a closer look at him, and you'll notice the following:</p>
<p><i>Possible distortions of humility:</i> Servility, indecision, gloominess, tearfulness, sluggishness, timidity, cowardice, all kinds of fears and phobias.</p>	<p><i>The qualities of pride:</i> having a high opinion of oneself, vain, hypocritical, stubborn, capricious, mistrustful, unpredictable, over-anxious, punctilious regarding himself, nagging, self-loving egoist, susceptible, impertinent, whimsical, quick-tempered, inclined to criticize and to</p>

reproach, hungry for power, haughty, envious, irreconcilable, rancorous, cruel, quick to insult, caustic, abnormally active, a defier of every authority. A revolutionary and nihilistic spirit. Satan, as the first revolutionary, lauds any kind of revolt as a fight for "freedom."

Conclusion.

This was a brief account of the humble state of mind and soul as described in patristic writings. As one can see, it has nothing to do with its vulgar understanding, when genuine humility is mistaken for servile self-disparagement. A humble person sees his imperfection and always turns to God for help. Acknowledging God as the ultimate Law-maker and Judge, he obeys Him in everything, bows to His will and does his best to abstain from sin. Being busy enough with improving himself, the humble person does not notice the mistakes of others and is always willing to forgive. He yearns for perfection, getting closer to God and glorifying Him is his most important objective.

No one is guaranteed against falling into an exaggerated opinion of oneself. The thirst for appraisal, the intention to put forward one's success, the desire to instruct and to command are negative traits that require correction. They are the steps towards vanity and pride, which render a man disagreeable for society and repulsive in the eyes of God.

The humble disposition is the most healthy and natural one. When one gets nearer to God through rightly directing his mind, or feels the touch of His all-encompassing grace in prayer, he cannot help feeling his minuteness and imperfection. Pride is the result of an exaggerated notion of oneself and one's abilities. It stems from spiritual blindness, when one is constrained within himself and fails to perceive God.

The Christian faith summons us to be modest and humble, accepting that everything good in us is not ours but belongs to God. Indeed, everything comes from God: our life, the beautiful world around us, our health, and all the various talents and advantages that we enjoy. For our faith, for the forgiveness of our numerous sins, for the deliverance from unknown dangers, for the grace-filled gifts, for the imperceivable ways of His providence along which He is leading us towards His Kingdom — for all of this, and for a lot more should we ever be grateful to our Heavenly Father, Who is giving us all of His goodness for the sake of His Only-Begotten Son, Who died on the Cross for us, sinners. If we did not prevent God from saving us, we would have all been in Heaven. It is our own stubbornness and

pride that is destroying us — there are but no other causes!

Thus humility is the *precious poverty* that leads one up the ladder of virtue, making one rich with spiritual gifts and, finally, placing him at the very entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let us complete this essay with a praise to humility from the **Elder Siluan**:

The soul of a humble man is like the sea: when you throw a stone into the sea, it will upset its surface just for a moment and drown immediately in its depth.

Thus grief drowns in the heart of the humble, because the Lord is with him.

Where do you abide, humble soul, and who abides within you, and what can you be likened to?

You are alight brightly like the sun, but you do not burn, and you give away your warmth to those beside you.

Yours is the land of the meek, according to the word of the Lord.

You are like a blooming garden, with a beautiful house in its depth, wherein the Lord likes to stay.

The Heaven and the earth love you.

The holy Apostles, Prophets, Hierarchs and Ascetics love you.

The Angels, Seraphim and Cherubim love you.

The All-Holy Mother of God loves you, the humble one.

The Lord Himself loves you and rejoices because of you.

Appendix.

Stories about pride.

1. A young monk, having read many stories about the ascetic feats of the ancient anchorites, decided to follow their example. He came to the monastery's blacksmith and asked the latter to forge *verigi* (metal chains that some ascetics wore for the mortification of their flesh) for him. The blacksmith considered the order to be somewhat out of the ordinary and refused to fulfill it. In a little while the monk came over again with the same request. Then the blacksmith asked the abbot: "What should I do?"

"Test him, — answered the abbot. — When he asks you again to make *verigi* for him, strike him on the cheek. If he is silent, do what he says, and if he is insulted, tell him that he is proud."

Now the monk came to the blacksmith for the third time with his request. The blacksmith pretended to be angry and hit him on the cheek. The offended monk returned in kind. Then the man told him:

"Forgive me, brother. The abbot ordered me to test you in this manner."

The monk understood then that his wish to wear *verigi* had been inspired by vanity and the vain wish to be like the saints. He was ashamed and left.

2. There lived a monk in a monastery who was disliked by the brethren. They would often abuse him, make fun of him and insult him in many ways. The monk, however, behaved with great dignity. His only response to all the insults was silence. Seeing this, the abbot was impressed with the monk's meekness and asked him once how he had managed to achieve such quietude and silence. The monk replied: "Why should I argue with those boors? They are nothing but dogs." On hearing such an answer, the abbot left him with great haste. He had never encountered such pride before.

This shows how vanity might be concealed under the most holy and seemly deeds.

3. An experienced elder persuaded his disciple during confession not to be proud. The other argued, blinded by his reasoning: "Excuse me, father, but I do not see any pride in myself." The wise elder answered: "You could not have given better proof that you are, indeed, proud, than by answering this way!"

4. The fallen Stephen. In the cenobia of the elder Pafnutios there lived a certain brother by the name of Stephen, who fell into shameful debauchery. They told similar stories of people who went off into the desert for the sake of virtue, but were later tempted with sinful thoughts and fell into gluttony, dissipation and other terrible passions.

The much-experienced abba Pafnutios said the following to this point: "Whatever happens with us has one of the two reasons: either by the benevolence of God or by His consent. Good deeds that lead to the glory of God are done by His benevolence; while everything that is tied up with damage, danger or some kind of trouble happens with His consent. This consent is allowed for those who are abandoned by God for their ill reason and disbelief, and for those who execute the virtues with an unclean purpose, in order to impress people or because of their proud thoughts. Such are abandoned by God in order to bring them to repentance, so that, left to their own will, they would realize their helplessness and correct their wrong ways."

5. Once the blessed Anthony was praying in his cell. A voice came to him, saying: "Anthony! You have not yet attained the measure of the tanner who lives in Alexandria." On hearing this, the elder got up early in the morning and hastened to Alexandria. When he came to the tanner, the latter was extremely surprised to see him. The elder said to him: "Tell me of your feats, because it is for this that I have come all the way from the desert." The tanner answered: "I don't remember the least good that I could have done at any time; that is why, when I get up early from my bed, before starting with my work, I tell myself: 'All the inhabitants of this city, from the small to the great, will enter the Kingdom for their virtues, and I alone will go to eternal fire for my sins.' I repeat the same words in my heart before I go to sleep." Hearing this, the blessed Anthony replied: "Indeed, my son, you, as a skilled artisan, sitting in your home, have acquired the Kingdom; while I, although I'm spending all my life in the desert, have not gathered the spiritual wisdom, nor reached the state of mind that you have shown with your words."

6. In Babylon, the daughter of an idolater was possessed by a demon. A monk said to her father: "No one is able to heal your daughter except for some hermits that I know, but they, too, are too humble to agree to this. Let us do the following: when the hermits come to market to sell their hand-made goods, we'll pretend to be their customers. When they come into your home to take the money, we'll ask them to say a prayer, and I trust that your daughter will be healed." So they came out to market where the disciple of a certain elder was selling his baskets. They invited him into the house in order to give him the money. When the monk stepped into the house, the possessed girl ran out to him and hit him on the cheek. Following the Saviour's commandment, he turned his other cheek to her. The demon was hurt with this and shouted: "Woe to me! The commandment of Jesus Christ is chasing me away!" The girl was freed of him right away. The elders were told of all that happened. They glorified God and said: "It is but common for devilish pride to fall before humility which accompanies the commandments of Christ."

7. In the Nitria desert (70 miles south-west from the city of Alexandria in Egypt) there lived a monk named Valent, a Palestinian by birth. For many years he exhausted himself with monastic feats, so that many considered him a prominent ascetic. But, tempted with self-esteem and pride, he fell into extreme vanity and came to imagine that angels were conversing with him and serving him.

Once late in the evening, when it was already dark, he dropped his awl to the floor as he was getting along with his baskets. He looked around for it to no avail when, suddenly, by demonic delusion, light appeared in his cell, and Valent saw his awl immediately. This "wonder" served to his further arrogance, so that he started to despise even the Holy Mysteries, considering that he didn't need to partake of them any more.

Later on, monks brought some fruit to give to the brethren. The blessed Macarios, the abbot of the monastery, sent a handful of them to the cell of each monk, including Valent. On receiving the fruits, Valent insulted and beat up the one who had brought them, saying: "Go tell Macarios that I'm no worse than him and that I don't need any of his blessings." Macarios understood that the brother had become the victim of devilish delusion and went to admonish him. "Brother Valent! You are in delusion. Think better of it and pray to God," — the experienced elder warned him. But Valent took no heed of this advice, so that Macarios had to leave, full of sorrow for the ailing monk.

The devil, then, having been assured that Valent was totally in his power, took on the image of the Saviour and came to him at night, surrounded by a multitude of demons, who, too, put on the appearance of angels with bright torches. So Valent saw a bright circle in front of himself and Christ standing in the middle. One of the demons, looking like an angel, told him: "With your feats and holy life you have pleased Christ so much that He Himself has kindly come to you. So, fall on your knees now and bow to Him." Not suspecting anything, Valent knelt down and bowed to Satan, who had the appearance of Christ.

The next day Valent came into the church and started boasting that Christ Himself had visited him. On saying this, he became frantic, shouted and threw himself at the brethren, so that he had to be tied up with chains. The brethren then spent a whole year praying for Valent and submitting him to various abasements, curing like with like (forcing out pride with humility). Thus, through their joint effort, they delivered him from a double disease — of insanity and satanic pride.

Sayings

about pride and humility.

From the Holy Scripture.

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Prov. 16:18).

Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honour is humility (Prov. 18:12).

(Sirach 3:17-18).

(Sirach 10:9).

(Sirach 10:18).

See also: Sirach 3:21; 4:7; 13:1; 20:11.

The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility (Prov. 15:33).

A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit (Prov. 29:23).

The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit (Ps. 34:18).

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isaiah 57:15).

Jesus Christ: *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls"* (Matt. 11:29).

The Apostles had an argument as to who is the senior among them: *"And Jesus called a small child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 18:2-4).

The prayer of the Virgin Mary: God *"hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed"* (Luke 1:48).

Jesus asked His disciples: *"For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth"* (Luke 22:27).

God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble (James 4:6).

Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject to one another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5; see also Ps.147:6).

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ: to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11).

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom (James 3:13).

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy (James 3:17).

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement (1 Cor.1:10).

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:1-5).

See also: Rom.12:16; 1 Cor.1:26-31; Col. 3:12.

From the Holy Fathers.

Saint Macarios the Great.

The Lord, knowing the weakness of man and his inclination to vainglory, restrains him and does not let him remain in a constant feat of self-improvement. Because since you, on acquiring something small, exalt yourself and become unbearable to others, how much more unbearable will you become if you come to enjoy all the spiritual gifts at once? This is why God, aware of your weakness, is sending you misfortunes according to His providence, so that you become humble and strive more vigorously towards Him.

When one has partaken of grace, he considers himself to be the worst of sinners. And this thought is only natural to him. The more one gets to know God, the more he believes that he is a know-nothing, and the more he learns, the more he deems himself not to know anything. The grace that is assisting him installs this way of thinking within him as only natural.

But if you should see that someone is vain and haughty because of his gifts, be sure that, even if he is performing miracles and bringing the dead back to life, ... he is being cheated by the evil power without his knowing of it. Even if he is doing miracles, don't believe him, because the mark of a genuine Christian is, on receiving a gift from God, to conceal it from the others. Being in possession of the King's treasures, the believer hides them, saying: "It's not mine; another one placed it here." But if anyone says: "What I have is enough for me, and I don't need any more" — he is not a Christian already, but is deluded and has become an instrument of the devil. Because the thirst of God is unquenchable, and as much one

is tasting and partaking of the spiritual gifts, so much does he get more thirsty. Such people have a burning and irrepressible love towards God. The more they are successful and acquiring, the more they see their poverty.

The blessed Diadochos.

He who loves himself cannot fully love God, and who does not love himself for a profound love of God, only such one really loves God. Such a person will never desire glory for himself but for God alone... It is natural for the God-loving soul that is filled with an experience of God to seek only the glory of God, and to be pleased with humility as regarding itself. Because glory becomes God alone, because of His greatness, and humility becomes the man.

Saint Elias the Ekdik?.

As one thinking highly of himself does not notice his drawbacks, so the humble does not notice his good qualities. The faults of the former are concealed by a wicked ignorance, and those of the latter — by a God-pleasing one.

As a trader is not a trader without gold, even if he is most capable of trading; so a man who is going through the ascetic feats without humility will not see the good fruit of virtue, no matter how much he might be relying on his reason.

Different elders.

If you see a young man who is living by his own will and boldly ascending the heaven, take him by his feet and pull him down to earth, because such an ascent is harmful to him.

A man's spiritual success is measured by his humility. As much as he is immersed in humility, so much will he soar up in virtue.

I prefer the sinning and repenting to the non-sinning and non-repenting (Abba Pimenos).

The humble one does not even have the tongue to reproach anyone of being careless or negligent. He does not have the eyes to notice the others' faults. He has no ears to listen how someone is being condemned... His only concern are his sins (Abba Isaiah).

Saint John Cassian.

The seventh battle to be fought is against the spirit of vanity — this manifold, ever-changing and subtle passion, which is often too difficult to discern and recognize, and against which it is extremely hard to guard oneself. Other passions are simple and onefold, but this one is diverse, and assaults the warrior of Christ from all sides, while he is still fighting and when he is close to victory. Vanity attempts to wound him in every possible way: through his dress, his walk, his stature, his voice, his reading, his fasting, his reclusion, his knowledge, his obedience, his humility, his good humour. Like a dangerous stone hidden underwater, it causes a fatal wreck when the sailors await it least of all.

Other passions fade and get weaker every day as we confront and overcome them. Some of them wither and calm down just because one changes his location and living conditions. Also, it is easier for us to keep watch and evade them because of their conflict with the corresponding virtues. But vanity, when beaten, goes on

fighting with new fury, and when it is considered dead, through its very supposed death rises again, recovering all its health and strength. Other passions only reign over those who have submitted to them, but this one assaults its victors with new ferocity, tempting them with vain thoughts about their success over it. That the warrior of Christ should wound himself with his own arrows is the enemy's subtle cunning.

The eighth and final fight is against the spirit of pride. This passion is the last in our rendering, but the first by origin. Pride is the most fierce and indomitable animal, which is especially active against the perfect ones, devouring them as they are almost at the apex of virtue.

Thus, we should strive towards perfection, so that, while vigorously fasting, keeping vigil, praying, maintaining a contrite heart and body, and doing other ascetic works, we should also avoid pride, which renders useless all of our toils. We should remember that it is not only impossible to attain perfection through our own efforts, but our very feats and other spiritual practices cannot be carried out without the grace of God.

Saint John of the Ladder.

The Lord often keeps the virtues that we have attained concealed from us. The one who is praising us, or, rather, leading us into delusion with his praise, is opening our eyes; but as soon as they are opened, the treasure of virtue is gone.

The proud one is like an apple which is rotten inside and shining with beauty on the outside.

The proud one does not need a demon to tempt him; he has become a demon for himself.

To one who is vain with his natural gifts, that is, sharpness of mind, good understanding, skilled reading and articulation and other qualities that we spend no toil to gain, the supernatural gifts will never be granted; because he that is unjust in the least is also in much unjust and vain.

No other thought is as hard to confess as a censuring one (which is caused by pride); that is why some suffer from such thoughts till their old age. We should know that nothing assists the demons as much as the concealment of bad thoughts, when we keep them inside, thus giving them more strength.

If pride has turned some of the angels into demons, than there is no doubt that humility can make angels out of demons. Therefore, have courage, ye the fallen, placing your hope in God.

It happens sometimes that the passions leave not just the believing, but also the disbelieving, leaving only one of them behind. The latter is the primary evil and has the capacity to replace all the others, being so harmful as to be able to drive one away from heaven itself — it is pride.

Very often God leaves in spiritual people some minor passions so that, realizing their shortcomings, they would reproach themselves, thus getting rich in humility.

As the poor, when they see the king's treasures, see their poverty more acutely, so does the soul, reading about the great virtues of the holy fathers, unwillingly get more humble in its thoughts.

He who is weak in body and has committed many serious sins, should follow the path of humility and the virtues that are of likeness to it, because for him there is no other way of salvation.

When the demon of pride has settled firmly enough in his servants, then, appearing to them in their sleep or openly, in the image of an angel or a saint, he reveals supposed mysteries to them, so that those wretched ones, being deluded, lose the last of their reason.

The Elders Barsanuphius and John.

Let us always resort to humility, because the humble one is lying on the earth, and how can one who is lying on the earth fall anywhere? While the one who has climbed up high can easily fall. If we have revised and improved our ways, this is not ours — it is a gift from God, because "*The Lord raiseth them that are bowed down, the Lord openeth the eyes of the blind*" (Ps.146:8).

One should consider himself more sinful than all the sinners and as having nothing good at all, reproaching oneself at all times, at any place and for every thing.

On the question whether one should argue back at the thoughts that are fighting us, I will answer: do not argue back. Because this is exactly what our enemies want us to do and, seeing us answering back, will not cease to attack us. Instead, pray to God about it, exposing your weakness before Him, and He will help you not just to chase away such thoughts, but to wipe them out completely.

Saint Isaac the Syrian.

As an antidote to the subtle feeling of vanity, sincerely confess your weakness and ignorance to God in prayer, so as not to be abandoned by God and be tempted with impure wishes, because fornication follows after pride.

Virtue is the mother of sorrow. Sorrow bears humility, and humility is granted with grace. The prize to follow is then given not for the virtue and not for the toils taken up for its sake, but for the humility which came through them. If humility is missing, then all the virtues are in vain.

The humble one is free from hurry, haste, confusion, from fervent or empty thoughts. He is always at ease. Nothing can overwhelm, embarrass, terrify him, because he is neither frightened or low-spirited in sorrow, nor carried away by rapture and astonishment in joy. But his only joy and delight is in that which is pleasing to his Lord.

Do not rely on your strength, so that the Lord does not let you fall by your weakness — and you will learn of it through bitter experience.

In anything of which one is boasting God does not let him be stable, so that, having come through misfortune, he would learn humility.

Honours run away from the one who is pursuing them, but they chase after those who evade them.

A man who has achieved the knowledge of his weakness has achieved the perfection of humility.

The genuine righteous ones always consider themselves unworthy of God. And that

they are righteous is evident from the very fact that they see themselves damned and undeserving of God's mercy, acknowledging this both secretly and openly, being enlightened to this effect by the Holy Spirit. They are encouraged to think this way by the Holy Spirit, so that they remain in toil and on the narrow path, as long as they are in this world. God has prepared rest for them in the age to come. Thus everyone in whom the Lord abides does not want to live at peace or to be freed from sorrow, although at times a mystical spiritual consolation is granted to them.

Saint Simeon the New Theologian.

If one, while being abased or vexed, suffers of it badly in his heart, it should be known of such a man that he is bearing the ancient snake (pride) in his depth. If he endures it silently, he will make this snake feeble and paralyzed. But if he argues and speaks back with bitterness and violence, he will give the snake more power to pour venom into his heart and devour his innermost without mercy.

Saint John of Kronstadt.

As much as you can, be meek, humble and simple with everyone, considering yourself, without pretence, to be the lowest, the most sinful and weak of all. Tell yourself: "I am the first among the sinners." Pride produces pomposity and a cold and insincere treatment of others.

Keep an attentive watch over the manifestations of pride: it comes up unnoticed, especially when you are upset with others on the most irrelevant matters.

If you want to be humble, consider yourself deserving every kind of malice and abuse from others. Do not be irritated when they are accusing or abusing you. Just say: "O my Holy Father! Not as I will, but as thou wilt." Remember what the Saviour said: "*The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you... If the world hateth you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you*" (John 15:20, 18).

Remember the saying of the Holy Scripture: "*Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good*" (Rom. 12:21). When someone is rude to you, when you are tempted, when they are breathing into your face with contempt and anger, do not return it in kind, but be silent, meek and benign, respectful and loving towards those who disbehave in front of you. For if you are shaken and start returning their words without peace, if you argue back with rudeness and disdain, it means you are overcome with evil and you should justly apply to yourself the saying: "*Physician, heal yourself,*" or: "*Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?... First cast out the beam that is in your own eye*" (Luke 4:23, Matt. 7:3-5)... Have pity with the one who has insulted you, because he is so easily conquered with his passions and has an ailing soul. The more he is rude and easily shaken, the more love you should show towards him. This way you will easily overcome him. Good is always stronger than evil and therefore more victorious. Remember, too, that all of us are very weak and are easily overcome with passions. Because of this, be meek and condescending towards those who sin against you. You have the same illness as your brother. Forgive your debtors so that your heavenly Father might forgive you your debts.

You do not want to pray for someone you despise, but that is the very reason to pray — that you do not want to. That is why you should resort to the Doctor, because you are yourself ill with anger and pride, just as the one you are despising.

Pray that God might teach you mildness and patience, that He should give you strength to love your enemies, and not just your well-wishers, that He should teach you to pray for your ill-wishers as sincerely as for your well-wishers.

The Elder Siluan.

If your mind wants to pray in the heart and cannot, read the prayer with your lips and hold the mind within the words of the prayer, as the "Ladder" tells. With time, the Lord will grant you cordial prayer without thoughts, and you will pray with ease. Some have damaged their hearts by attempting to pray with the mind in the heart, and finished with not being able to pray even with the mouth. But you should know the order of spiritual life: gifts are granted to the simple, humble and obedient souls. To him who is obedient and temperate in all: in food, in his speech, in his movements, the Lord Himself gives prayer, and it goes on with ease in his heart.

Incessant prayer comes with love and is lost for condemnation, empty talk, and intemperance. Whoever loves God can think about Him day and night, because no chores can prevent one from loving God.

To learn Christ's humility is a great blessing. When you have it, life becomes easy and joyful, and everything is pleasing for the heart. God reveals Himself in the Holy Spirit only to the humble, and if we do not humble ourselves, we will not see God. Humility is the light in which we can see the Light — God, as is sung: "In Thy light shall we see light."

The Lord loves people, but He sends them troubles so that they should learn of their weakness and become humble, and receive the Holy Spirit for the sake of humility, and with the Holy Spirit everything is good, and joyful, and beautiful.

One suffers a lot from poverty and illness, but he does not humble himself, and therefore all his suffering is in vain. And the one who has humbled himself will be content with any fate, because the Lord is his wealth and joy, and all the people will marvel at the beauty of his soul.

You will say: I have a lot of troubles. But I, or, better, the Lord Himself will say: humble yourself, and you will see all your troubles turn into rest, so that you will be surprised and say: why have I suffered and lamented so before? But now you are rejoicing, because you have humbled yourself, and the grace of God has come; now, if you sit alone in poverty, this joy will stay with you, because you have peace in your soul, the peace of which the Lord said: "*My peace I give unto you.*" Thus to every humble soul the Lord gives His peace.

There are many kinds of humility. One is obedient and condemns himself always, and this is humility. Another one repents of his sins and considers himself filthy before God — and this, too, is humility. But the one who has got to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit has another kind of humility. He who has got to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit has a different knowledge and a different taste.

When the soul sees the Lord in the Holy Spirit, how much He is meek and humble, then she herself humbles in a finite manner. And this is a very special kind of humility, which no one can describe, and it is conceived only through the Holy Spirit. And if people could, through the Holy Spirit, know what our Lord is like, everything would have changed: the rich would have forgotten their treasures, the learned — their sciences, the rulers — their power and glory, and everyone would have humbled himself, and would have lived in great peace and love, and great joy

would be on Earth.

Elder Paisios Eznepidis?.

Elder Paisios regarded humility as the cornerstone of a Christian's spiritual life. He said: "God loves every person very much, knows the problems of each one of us perfectly and is wishing to give help before our asking for it, because nothing is too difficult for the all-mighty God. But even God is facing a difficulty in the case of a non-humble man! I repeat that there is but one problem that God can face — that He "cannot" help as long as the soul of a person is not humble. Then the all-good God, in a way, is "upset," seeing that His creation is thus tortured, and He "cannot" help, because He knows that what is requested will harm the person, the latter lacking a humble disposition. Whatever happens to us is absolutely dependent of humility. We see, for instance, that someone is fought and conquered by a certain passion. God allows this only because his soul has the thought or is close to accepting it (that is, has a disposition towards pride). A man can hate certain passions and not wish them, and even shed blood to get rid of them — but he will not be successful in the very least, because God is not helping him. And He will not help, until the latter humbles himself (because, although he hates some of the passions, he is still the slave of pride, which lets in all the other passions).

To succeed spiritually, one should ask for love, prayer, wisdom, obedience and other virtues from God. But God wants us to understand (please make good notice of it) that He will give us nothing of what we ask, however much we should toil, if we don't humble ourselves in the first place. And when humility is our only objective, God gives everything else for free.

God desires only one thing from us — humility, and nothing else. He just wants to help us with His divine grace, which He, even before we start loving Him, before we make any effort, gave us in the Holy Baptism by His inexpressible grace. Grace assists us to love the Lord and to know Him. The Lord does everything for us — the only thing we should have is humility, so as not to resist the divine grace, letting it to act. We only resist it when we don't have humility. Only one thing resists the divine grace — it is pride.

The Optina Elder Barsanuphius Plekhankov.

To be likened to God one must fulfill His holy commandments, but if we look closer on them, we'll see that we haven't fulfilled a single one. Let us go through all of them and we will see that we have just touched upon this commandment, just started fulfilling another, and, say, the commandment about love for one's enemies has been totally forgotten. What is left for us sinners? How shall we be saved? There is but one way — through humility. "Lord, I have sinned in everything, I have nothing good at all, your unlimited mercy is my only hope." We are complete bankrupts before God, but for the sake of humility He will not turn away from us. Indeed, it is better, having many sins, to consider oneself a great sinner, than, having some good deeds, to be proud of them, supposing oneself righteous. The Gospel gives two such examples which are the Pharisee and the publican.

Saint Theophanes the Recluse.

Simplicity is the necessary trait of humility. That is why there is no humility when simplicity is lacking. Simplicity is never sly, suspicious, susceptible, does not notice itself, does not ascribe itself any meaning, is never trying to be wise, etc. All this means humility. Humility's main trait is to feel that I am nothing and whatever I

have is the Lord's...

You are saying that the spirit of vanity is attacking you. Be careful. This snake has many heads. Sometimes it even takes on the image of humility... Vanity is subtle, but it makes the soul coarse. And the Lord soon takes away His grace from those who encourage vain thoughts, allowing them to fall. Thus, danger might be very close at hand.

Pride is the most fatal passion, and all the more fatal that it is clean from the outside. That the elders have told you about humility in your childhood means that God wants you to become humble on your own, and He is ready to give you humility, if you strive for it...

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466 Foothill Blvd, Box 397, La Canada, Ca 91011

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Donald Shufran	4-16-2002