

# Humility

A lecture given to the Community of Lay Assumption (CLA)

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Since the origin of the Congregation, there was a chapter on Humility in our Rule of Life or Constitution, which is not true of all congregations, of all spiritualities. Marie Eugenie starts with Humility because she believed that without humility any effort in spiritual formation will not bear much fruit. Why? Because Humility is a fruit -- a result, an outcome of love (MME speaks of the experience of a peasant who realizes she is loved by the King). What comes through is a deep sense of gratitude for being loved!

The Rule of Life of the Religious of the Assumption states, "one who is humble is grateful, confident, truly happy, and simple. Though we know that we need to work for humility all our life, it is finally given as a gift! (RL 42)

As we go through MME's Chapter on Humility, notice how we cannot separate humility from love -- the perfect love of Jesus Christ. M. Eugenie herself said: "I cannot do otherwise than to see humility in reference to love." For her, the most important factor is love.

The subtle foundation of the virtue of humility for MME is an attitude born of love -- love emanating from each person of the Trinity for each other, and for the whole creation. The experience of being loved by God brings out a strong sense of gratitude, and desire to be like Jesus whose love for His Father made Him obey His will.

She takes Humility from 2 points of view:

- **Truth** - knowledge of God and knowledge of oneself. St. Augustine: "that I may know you, that I may know myself.
- **Love** - it is love that M. Eugenie underlines in this Chapter.

Truth is the first aspect or perspective of humility: knowing that God is All, that God is Creator ... All that I am, all that I have is a gift. Therefore, we know our nothingness and dependence -- this is living in the **truth** of what we are. All that I am ... what I have become today has been made possible by God's grace. This is a realization that is based on truth. We don't have to pretend that we are the origin of ourselves, that what we are comes from us... We know that we have received all -- and all these have been made possible by one who loves us.

Right at the start of the Chapter MME says, "I want to stress... I want to begin with humility... Without humility there is no spiritual life." We cannot get along in the spiritual life without humility. When asked about what the most important virtue is, St. Augustine said: Humility. And the second? Humility. And the third? Humility. So for us in the spiritual life, it is a question of wanting to be humble, of seeking humility and taking the means to form ourselves in humility.

And for MME, Humility is a question of love. The humility she asks us to practice is in the name of love. Love is the deepest motivation, the most important factor of humility. Love is a virtue that expands the heart...

Then she quotes St. Augustine talking about 2 cities:

- the City of God
- the City of Satan

In the City of God -- the love of God is pushed and lived to the point of self-forgetfulness (the word used is not "despise" or "hate" oneself) -- but we forget ourselves when we love much. When we analyze the experience of sincere love, the person who loves gives and gives -- is willing to do anything for the other and is willing to be humble. Nothing seems too much nor too low ... Humility is loving God to the point that we forget ourselves.

In the City of Satan, self-love is pushed to the point of forgetting God. The main obstacle is self-love that shrinks and locks us up to ourselves.

The principal work, as we begin our spiritual journey is to uproot false self-love... We can never really know if we are humble. It is clearer to see it from the other side ... the opposite, which is pride. We can detect the movements of pride, we can see our sins of pride. Sometimes it takes a lot of discernment because the devil is very clever, and our own human spirit is very clever in hiding pride.

We know when our self-love is troubled.. we react. It is an instinctive reaction because we want to preserve life. The tendency is to protect ourselves, to cling.. when self-love is touched, we feel the sting. The feeling itself is automatic. So what do we do when the feeling comes? How do we handle it? Deny it? Or do something worse, like react to the person who pricks our self-love? Covering up the thing that is pointed out? We do not readily accept criticisms, we will find excuses...

What do we do when these things happen? Be aware... train ourselves when someone criticizes us-to be quiet, and afterwards when we are calm, look into it, we can say to ourselves, "Yes, there's some truth in what was said." That's what is important: looking for the truth!

We combat all these things by love. "Penetrated by love you should not want to keep the miseries of pride and self-love." MME

For love -- nothing is too much or too low. Let us consider the example she gives: that of Jesus' own love. Jesus manifests his love for us in self-emptying... "He did not hesitate to show us..." He made that love take him to the humiliation of the Cross. The Cross is above all a humiliation...In his time,the worst thing that could happen was death on the cross- the most ignominious death, one reserved for a non-citizen or a slave.

Jesus, in manifesting his humility, in giving us the example, revealed his love for the Father and for us. It was also the revelation of God that God is humble.

Sometimes we take the teachings of Jesus and the things he tells us to do as being things that please him. It doesn't please him that we are humble because it is an act we do for him. It doesn't please him that we accept humiliation because it is a gift that we give him. What pleases him is that which makes us loving, what accomplishes us, fulfills us as human beings and fills us with God, fills us with love.

MME said that, "The motive of our humility is the fact that we know God. Adoration places us out of ourselves and places us at the feet of the other. And it is a joyful act of love, for the one we love is the one who loves us. And for this, humility is not a sad and depressing virtue. People think at times that humility is a sad virtue. Is It sad to follow Jesus in His humility? To offer him your heart, to take the means to find him and make your relationship with him more intimate? Is it sad to pay the price for love?"

Humility is definitely positive. It has positive effects. It brings liberty -- freedom from all self-love, from pretence, lies; freedom from desire for esteem, praise, success

To describe humility MME uses these words: simple, sincere, real, frank, joyful, deep, generous. She says : "I have heard it said that humility is not the outstanding virtue of the Assumption. I cannot accept that, and I regret it very much. On the contrary, Humility must be the fundamental virtue of the Assumption... but take it from the side of love and trust..."

There's another point that MME talks about regarding humility. It goes well with what she said about humility not being a sad virtue, "Our humility should not be one of appearance..." Being quiet...being the last to speak... or act – may not mean being humble at all!

The way to be humble is to have an enthusiasm for life! "To take initiatives and learn new things. To make mistakes and learn from them. To see the gifts of God...How good God is to me!" To discover beauty in nature, beauty in cyberspace that connect us to one another across continents, beauty in this powerpoint that can be a tool for good news...Humility is accepting new gifts from God's hands, from the hands of fellow human beings... to appreciate them as good and use them for the good. When we are grateful, when we can appreciate more and more things... we are on the road of humility.

And in all this – we ask ourselves...What makes me more apostolic? More loving? More humble?

To be humble is also about finding our place. We need to recognize that we have a place. It is one thing go about looking for people to appreciateus, to recognize us and another thing to find oneself. Each person has a place in the group. Each one has gifts which are at the service of the group. In a community each person has something to give.

Find out what it is, and accept and love yourself as you are today. What about my difficulties? My problems? We need to move on. If we don't accept ourselves right now... as we are - it is very hard to advance, to move. If we don't love ourselves, we start pretending to be better or to be worse, pretending we are different... and we get angry...

God loves us right now, and under the loving gaze of God everything is fine right now. God loves me right now.. It takes humility to accept that, (esp. when the "now" finds me at my ugliest moment)

The whole chapter on Humility is a call to love and a response to love. MME does not give little means. There is only one great means: the love of God. All of these being said, humility is impossible on our means.

"We need to work at it all our life. We do everything we can. We desire and work for it. But, in the end it is God who gives humility as a gift. Without Him we will never be humble."

MME tells us: "The more you are sincerely humble...the more you open your heart to love. The more the Lord Himself becomes the promised hundredfold."

St. Marie Eugenie ends the Chapter on Humility with... "Each one has her own path to HUMILITY."