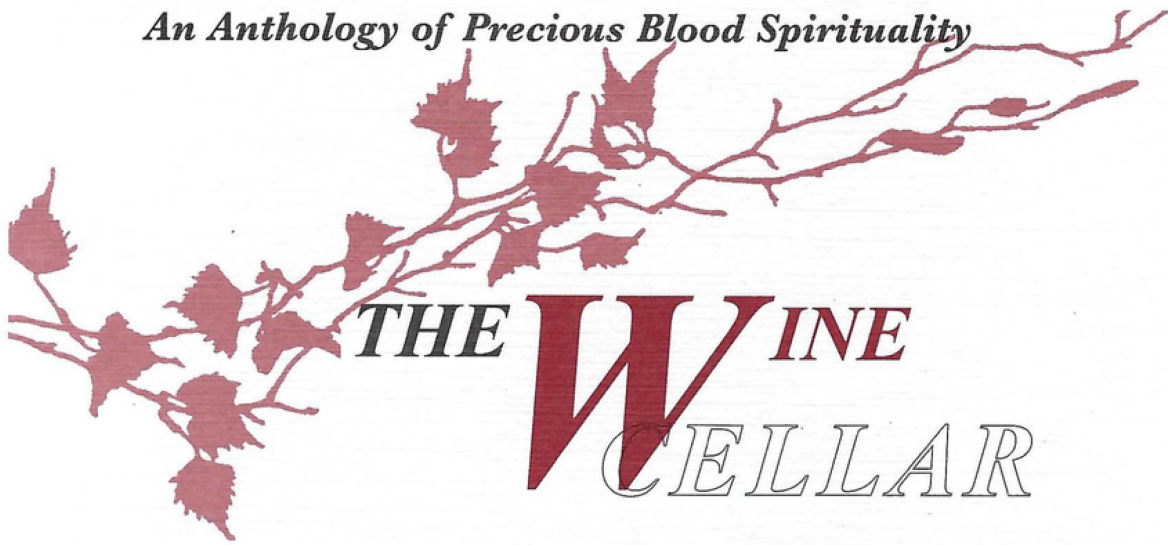


*An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality*



**THE** **W**INE  
CELLAR

Winter 2005 • Number 18

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Humility

*The heart of Jesus  
is the wine cellar  
of the Blood of Christ*

**Gaspar del Bufalo**

*The  
Wine Cellar*

***An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality***

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Published by the Kansas City Province

**Editorial Address:** PO Box 339, Liberty, MO 64069-0339

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Printed by Trojan Press, Inc. North Kansas City, MO

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From the

## *Wine Cellar*



By Joseph Nassal, CPPS

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## The Learning Center for Humility

*Practice humility always, and may it be your delight.*

St. Gaspar del Bufalo (#1372)

**I**n September 1998 I gave a Day of Prayer for priests from New Jersey and New York at the Friary of St. Francis of Assisi. The Friary is located in midtown Manhattan, a block from Madison Square Garden, in the shadow of the Empire State Building, and within walking distance of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rockefeller Center, Greenwich Village, and the bright lights of Broadway. I stayed a few days enjoying the hospitality of the Franciscans as I took a small bite out of the Big Apple.

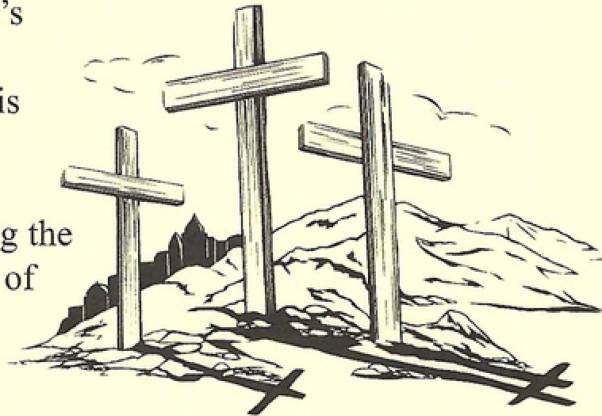
One evening I attended a community gathering and was approached by a Friar who was gracious and friendly. He told me he was a chaplain with the New York City Fire Department. The local firehouse was right across the street from the Friary. We talked for quite awhile as he was engaging and charismatic but since he was one of more than the fifty Friars living in the community I didn't think anything more about my meeting with this particular priest.

I didn't think anything more about my meeting with this particular priest until almost three years later to the day that I met him. That is because on September 11, 2001, this Friar became famous as one of the first victims identified in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Father Mychal Judge was killed when he was hit by falling debris as he prayed with a dying firefighter. The picture of firefighters carrying out the lifeless body of Mychal Judge was on the front pages of newspapers and magazines around the world. The firefighters placed his body on the altar at St. Peter's Church near ground zero.

Recently a friend sent me Michael Ford's biography of Father Judge. Ford paints a portrait of a priest who knew who he was as a Franciscan, a recovering alcoholic, and a celibate gay priest. Though he never shunned the spotlight and enjoyed rubbing shoulders with the high and mighty, Mychal Judge spent most of his life serving the down and out. In addition to his work with the poor, hungry, and homeless in the city, he was one of the first priests in New York City to open his heart to people living and dying with AIDS in the early 1980s.

The key to Father Mychal Judge's charismatic and compassionate presence in the lives of others was his own experience of the cross.

According to Ford, "His sense of leadership emerged through his living the Franciscan charism of joy and sense of purpose, with an emphasis on the reality of Jesus being the Light of the Word, the Bread of Life, and the Good Shepherd. There was a moral leadership of persuasion there rather than a leadership of office (p. 57)."



This is the kind of leadership we need in the church today: humble leaders who know their weakness but who also have an inner resolve to know and trust the providence and promise of God. We learn this kind of humility at the foot of the cross.

This issue of *The Wine Cellar* explores the virtue of humility as it is found in the lives and writings of the four founders of Precious Blood congregations: St. Gaspar del Bufalo, St. Maria De Mattias, Sister Theresa Weber, and Mother Anna Maria Brunner. In reflecting on how each of these humble and holy servants of the blood of Christ cultivated this virtue in the landscape of their religious lives, we sense how essential humility is in living out the charism of our congregations and the spirituality of Precious Blood today.

Gaspar often wrote about humility. He said it "is the dearest to me, but it is a teacher that gives lengthy lessons (3785)." He believed the virtue of humility is the hallmark of a disciple: "To guard and to increase the holy gifts granted us by God, let us not cease to ground ourselves in holy humility. This virtue is the basis for every good work, the source of every heavenly blessing and the ladder to

*The key to Father Mychal Judge's  
charismatic and compassionate  
presence in the lives of others was his  
own experience of the cross.*

heaven. We are worth something only because of the aggregate of God's gifts given to us (1206)." Gaspar advised his confreres to "cultivate the virtue of humility (1281)."

Wounds have a way of teaching humility. "I place all within the wounds of my Jesus and, mindful of what I preach to others," Gaspar wrote, "I shall occupy my time in prayer and pray even more for you and for all the individuals with you, for whose souls I desire, as I yearn for my own, the acquisition of a true knowledge of one's own nothingness in the presence of God (2191)."

We see Gaspar's humble spirit in his desire to remain hidden. He did not aspire to make a name for himself but rather to inspire others to follow the name of Christ. "Pray in a special way that the Lord will always keep me insignificant, neglected, hidden from the eyes of the world and grant me the doing of much good work, but in a hidden way (3785)." In another letter he wrote, "So there is no doubt that the more we know God, so much the more do we recognize our own nothingness. This acknowledgment, though it may go against our spirit, helps us in the practice of holy humility (2034)."

Certainly the scandals and abuses of power in the Church, the human disasters of violence, terrorism, and war in the world, and the natural disasters of hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes have humbled many and offered fertile ground for learning humility. With these recent events as a backdrop, and drawing upon the wisdom of saints and sages like Mother Theresa and his own grandmother, Father Angelo Anthony reflects on an "understanding of humility" that "has helped me stay grounded in the midst of some difficult situations." As a servant leader in the congregation and Church today, Angelo views the virtue of humility as the path to true peace. He writes how cultivating humility in our daily lives and relationship will yield a harvest of justice.

*Certainly the scandals and abuses of power in the Church, the human disasters of violence, terrorism, and war in the world, and the natural disasters of hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes have humbled many and offered fertile ground for learning humility.*

Sister Joann Fischer picks up this theme by reflecting on "the relationship between humility and reconciliation as manifested in the life of Theresa Weber, foundress of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon". Joann offers anecdotes and insights from the life

of Theresa as well as her own life in community and ministry to show how the virtue of humility calls forth from her “an honesty that is both a grace and a challenge.”

As a pastor of a large parish, Father Michael Volkmer knows how humbling ministry in the Church today can be. He traces the roots of humility in the gospel stories of Jesus while offering “the empty cup” as a prayerful “expression of our neediness, our powerlessness, our emptiness, our humanness as we stand with open arms before the Lord.”

Sister Marla Gipson of the Dayton Precious Blood congregation links humility to her baptismal identity and her evolving experience of consecrated life. “As consecrated women,” she writes, “We are people who muster the humility and courage to walk through the depths of the cross of suffering.” Her experiences in community and in pastoral ministry confirm how the cross is at the center of our understanding of humility.

It is in the shadow of the cross as she “knelt in prayer before the crucified Lord” that Saint Maria De Mattias “learned that the humility and meekness of Jesus led him to do always the will of his Father who sent him,” Sister Loretta Gegen writes in the last article of this issue. Tracing some of the experiences in the life of St. Maria and the wisdom of her writings, Sister Loretta paints a powerful portrait of a humble saint whose “genuine humility wrapped in courage and the tender love for God and her ‘dear neighbor’ were the hallmarks that were to characterize the remainder of her life.”

The common ground shared by Gaspar, Maria, Theresa, and Maria Anna is the cross of Christ where the Precious Blood seeps into the soil of our souls and makes the ground fertile for forgiveness and rich in a reconciling spirit. It is this same spirit of humble service that guides the lives of those we admire today for their courage, their compassion, and their witness to the truth.

People like Father Mychal Judge. “For him,” Michael Ford writes, “the cross represented the place of God’s most intimate engagement with the world.” His own experiences of suffering kept him humble throughout his life. And this is captured so clearly in the prayer that Mychal Judge offered each morning to begin his day. On the morning of September 11, 2001, this is the prayer that welcomed the dawn. Like the famous prayer of his founder, St. Francis, this is the prayer of a humble servant:

“Lord, take me where you want me to go;  
let me meet who you want me to meet;  
tell me what you want me to say,  
and keep me out of Your way.”



To guard and to increase  
the holy gifts granted us by God,  
let us not cease to ground ourselves  
in holy humility.

This virtue is the basis  
for every good work,  
the source of every heavenly blessing  
and the ladder to heaven.

We are worth something  
only because of the aggregate  
of God's gifts given to us.

St. Gaspar del Bufalo





# Humility as a Path to Peace

**By Angelo Anthony, CPPS**

**T**here was a song that came out in the early 1980s by Mac Davis that went something like this: “O Lord it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way. To know me is to love me.” The song became an anthem for those who were on the fast track to success and perfection. I suspect most of us fell off that train a long time ago.

In our search to make sense out of our less than perfect existence, our ancestors in faith have taught us that there are certain tools that are foundational to living an integrated and peaceful life. One of the tools that guide us in our journey to perfection in Christ is the gift of humility.

Like a diamond, there are many facets to this gem we call humility. Mother Teresa believed that “humility is truth.” She said, “The path that will make us more like Jesus is the path to humility.”(1) St. Thomas Aquinas noted, “If God...has [so] humbled himself for our sake, should not we submit to one another for God’s sake?”(2) And St. Augustine drew the conclusion, “The whole of the Christian religion is humility.”(3)

In the Letter to the Philippians St. Paul wrote, “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2,5-8).”

Our faith tradition offers Jesus as the guide to living a life of humility for in him we come to understand the humility of God. When you think of the images of humility in the life of Jesus, which ones come to mind? (*Pause and ponder this question for yourself.*) As I reflected upon this image I found that one story led to another. Here are a few of the thoughts that came to mind for me.

### **The Humility of Jesus**

**T**he humility of Jesus is revealed in his relationships as he stood with the poor and the wealthy and saw in them the beloved of God.

The humility of Jesus is found in the encounter of Jesus with the Canaanite woman, one whom he considered to be a dog but came to see as a woman of great faith.

The humility of Jesus came to light in his table practices as he ate with tax collectors and sinners as well as during the last supper meal when he broke bread with one who was going to betray him and one who was going to deny him.

The humility of Jesus is made known in his persistence as he kept reaching out to the “institutional church” of his day even though he was rejected for speaking in truth. He kept his focus upon the lost children of Israel and held them in his heart as he wept over Jerusalem.

The humility of Jesus is seen as he rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey to shouts of “Hosanna to the Son of David,” only to understand that his message had been misunderstood by the people. So he returns to the temple and starts preaching all over again.

The humility of Jesus is revealed in the resurrection narrative when he appears to the frightened disciples who had abandoned him and his first words to them are, “Peace be with you.”

The virtue of humility was personified in so many ways through the words and actions of Jesus. Followers of Christ are challenged to go and do the same. It is a formidable challenge because of the images of success, beauty, health and wealth that are paraded past our eyes each day. We cannot underestimate how the experiences of instant messaging, CNN news on the quarter hour, microwaves, palm pilots and cell phones dull our senses and set us up for frustration as the experiences of life cannot be solved at the touch of a button.

### **Cultivating Humility**

**H**umility is integrally connected to the practice of contemplation. Walter Burghardt describes contemplation as “a long loving look at the real.” He emphasizes that each word in this description is crucial: real...look...long...loving. “The *real*, reality is

not reducible to some far-off, abstract thing. Reality is living, pulsing people, elements like fire and ice. The real I *look* at is not there to be analyzed or argued with; I am one with it and my whole self is caught up in the experience. This look at the real is a *long* look. Not in terms of time, but before time in the world of being. This long look must be a *loving* look meaning there is oneness with the other.”(4)

In this long loving look at the real we find over and over again the Beloved, the one who has created all things in love. By taking this long loving look we are drawn to contemplate all aspects of our life, the blessed as well as the broken and painful.

As a person who likes gardening I am very connected to the root meaning of the word humility, “humus.” Growing up in the country we always had a large garden and a compost pile. The compost pile would capture all of the discarded peelings, vines and organic trash. Over the course of time the rain and sun and worms would transform that garbage into rich humus or dirt. In composting nothing is wasted and, in fact, that which was seen as rubbish becomes essential to the fertility of the earth.

This understanding of humility has helped me stay grounded in the midst of some difficult situations. The failed attempts, misunderstood intentions, frustrated plans and broken relationships are often brought to the compost pile of prayer to see what I can learn from the garbage heap of life. I believe this is one of the reasons St. Gaspar would invite people to read the great book of the crucifix to see there the unconditional love of God poured out for all. Through his use of the crucifix Gaspar highlights the humility of God who broke the cycle of violence by placing his life into our hands. In this great act of love and humility Christ put an end to sin and death and reveals the path to peace.

Nicki Verploegen tells the story of a great desert father of the third century who was called to judge another desert dweller on some misbehavior. He did not want to go, but his brother Abbas prevailed upon him. To make his point, he took a large pot with a hole in it, filled it with water, and laboriously carried it over the desert miles, leaving a trail of water in his passage. When his fellow monks saw him burdened with his leaky load,

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they ran out to inquire why he was carrying such a faulty vessel. With sadness in his heart, he told them that his sins ran out behind him and yet this day he was called to judge another man. The judgment was called off. (5)

When we take a long loving look at the real in our lives we must honestly admit that we are sinners and that none of us is perfect. Christ calls us to turn away from sin so that we might live in the light. The garbage that we have done to ourselves or others, our blindness to what we have failed to do can become rich humus in the redemptive and reconciling Blood of Jesus. Just as St. Gaspar saw the Sacred Heart as being the wine cellar of the Precious Blood, I believe we could also say that the Sacred Heart is the compost pile in the garden of life. It is here that we can bring the garbage of life and let it mix with the mercy of God who makes all things new.

### **The Harvest of Justice**

**G**oing to the heart of Jesus with the sins of our lives and the sin of the world is an opportunity to turn the hurt of the past into a rich harvest of justice and peace. “We all have the duty to work for peace,” Mother Teresa said. “But in order to achieve peace, we should learn from Jesus to be meek and humble of heart (Matthew 11:29). Only humility will lead us to unity, and unity will lead to peace.” (6)

This quote has taken on special significance for me as I have been confronted with the responsibility of offering a compassionate response to the sexual abuse crisis within our church. On the days I have met with victims of abuse I have found myself juggling a mixture of emotions. Though I was not the perpetrator I was called upon to listen and to offer words of healing. For me, the Precious Blood image of the

*For me,  
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of the covenant  
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covenant has helped me to say, “I’m sorry” in the name of the perpetrator, the church and the community. The unity that was ripped apart by sin can only be restored by the humble acknowledgement of the sin and the promise of hope that is found in God’s covenant sealed in the Blood of Christ.

Embracing a life of humility means we must accept *who* we are and *whose* we are. We are God’s children and we belong to God.

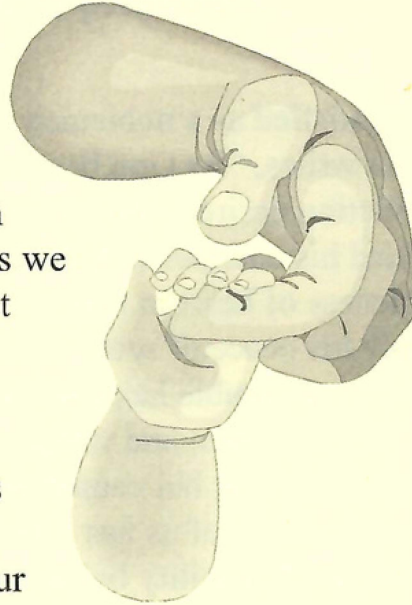
All that we have and all that we are is a gift from God.

Acknowledgement of this fundamental relationship was important to St. Gaspar. "If only you made this meditation," he wrote, "Who is God? Who am I? What beautiful lessons such reflection could produce!"(7)

Fr. Carroll Stuhlmeuller takes this relationship a step further and wrote:

"Once we forget that gifts are gifts, not personal property; once we no longer remember that gifts are given and not earned by our ability or merits, at that very moment, we have lost the gift. It is no longer a gift but something stolen from God. We return to our sinful state. Unless we rid ourselves of pride and bias, we will not possess God's gift of faith and blessed hope."(8)

Each of us is born into this life with clenched fists. The path of humility seeks to open our hands and hearts to see all things as gift so that God can place into our life or take from our life whatever God deems appropriate.



## Humility and Prayer

**A**s a youth my grandma had come to live with our family after grandpa died. One evening during my teenage years I was heading off to bed and as I got near to grandma's room, the light from the hallway allowed me to see that she was kneeling at her bedside saying her prayers. Grandma was always a positive role model in my life, a humble person who accepted the ups and downs of life with an amazing sense of peacefulness. She understood that she belonged to God and that God cared for her. I remember thinking to myself, Angelo, that's not a bad practice for you to begin. If your grandma, who would have been around 80 years old at the time, was still kneeling at her bedside in a posture of humility, you could learn something from that example. I often find myself at the foot of my bed at night turning the day over to God remembering who I am and whose I am.

The Catechism of the Church notes that humility is the foundation of prayer. "Only when we humbly acknowledge that 'we do not know how to pray as we ought (Rom 8:26)' are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer."(9) From this perspective we are brought back to the understanding that in life God is God and we're not. This means that we also need to be aware of our images of God and through the practice

of contemplation remain true to the God revealed to us through Jesus Christ and not the god of our own making.

St. Thomas Aquinas knew this truth in his life. “For Thomas the Holy Spirit filled him with peace by turning all the desires he could

*...humility is the foundation of prayer.*

have satisfied as a nobleman into one great desire for God,” Mary Ann Fatula writes. “As God became all that he wanted, he let go of conflicting desires—for riches, power, prestige—that would have divided his energies and thus destroyed his peace of heart. This singleness of heart in turn gave him a humility that fostered even more deeply his peace of soul. Thomas had made the conscious choice to live with a humble heart as the only path to true peace.”(10)

The holy men and women I spoke of throughout this article have pointed the way, but cannot take the place of our call to lead lives of humility. Each of us has a unique way of giving living expression to the virtue of humility because of the creative and reconciling love of God at work within us and through us. When each of us takes a long loving look at our life as it really is and humbly embrace our life we will see how humility is a pathway to peace.

As Thomas Merton said so well, “How do you expect to reach your own perfection by leading somebody else’s life? You must have the humility to work out your own salvation in a darkness where you are absolutely alone...And so it takes heroic humility to be yourself and to be nobody but the man [woman], that God intended you to be.(11)



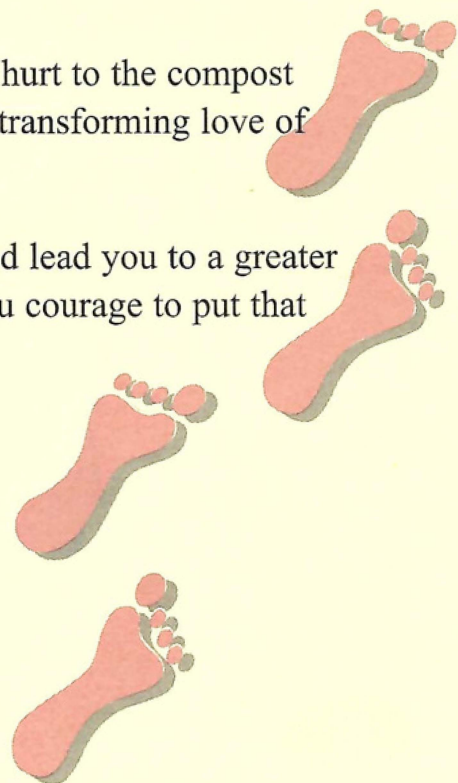
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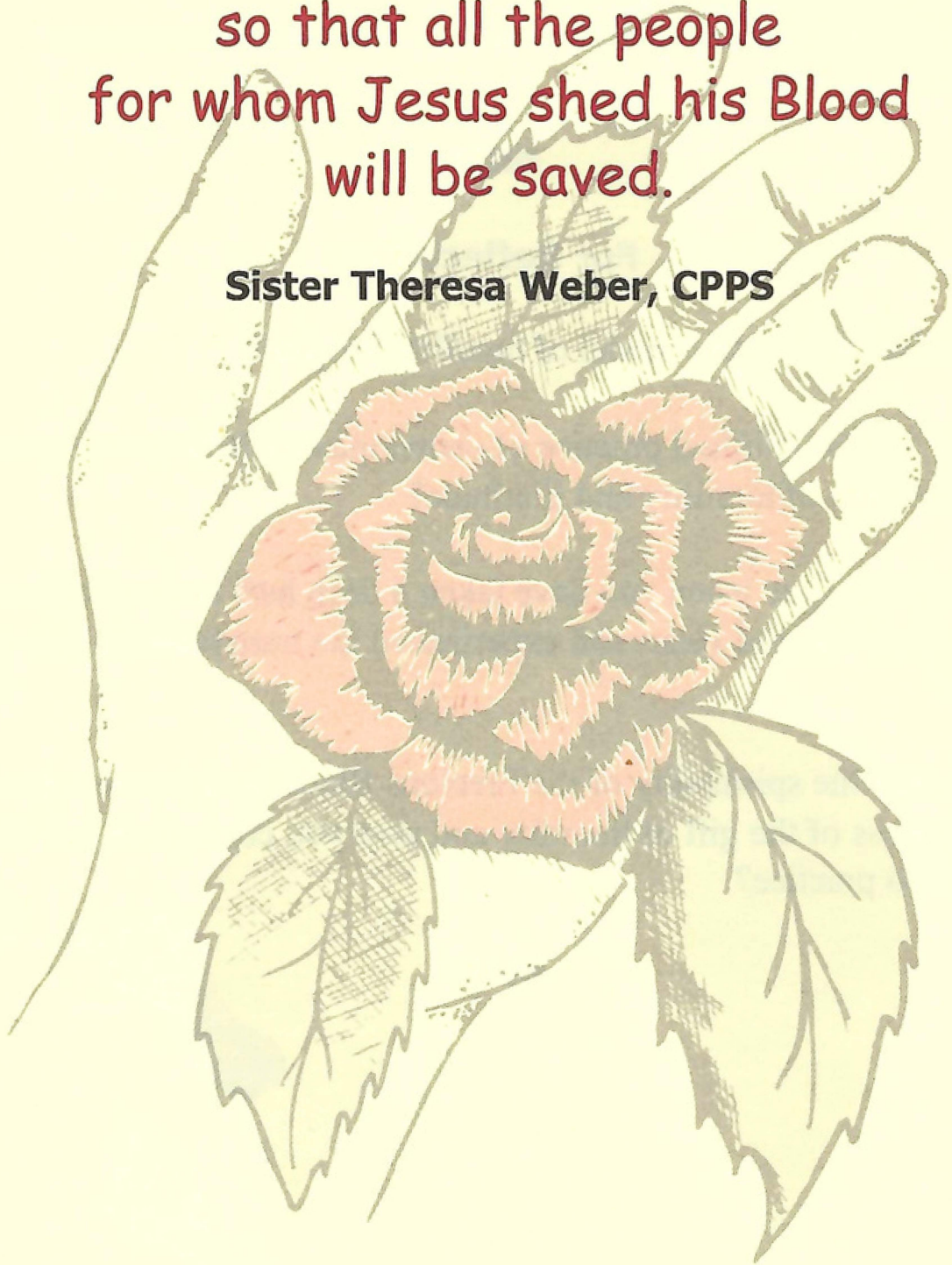
### For Reflection

- Who has been a role model of humility for you?
- How can the spiritual practice of contemplation help you to grow in living a life of humility and gratitude?
- Describe a time when you have taken a deep hurt to the compost pile of the Sacred Heart and experienced the transforming love of God?
- How can the spirituality of the Precious Blood lead you to a greater awareness of the gift of humility and give you courage to put that gift into practice?



Every person is precious...  
as precious as the Blood of Christ...  
Therefore nothing should be  
too difficult for us  
so that all the people  
for whom Jesus shed his Blood  
will be saved.

**Sister Theresa Weber, CPPS**





# Humility: A Way of Love for the Life of the World

By Joann Fischer, CPPS

**W**hile working in the inner city of St. Louis, I met many “saints” from the street, visitors who had come to the food pantry for assistance. The memory of one woman who didn’t come very often stays with me. She had come on a particular day to receive aid and asked if she could speak to someone. She followed me to the backyard bench and began her story. She was beset with many drawbacks in her young life. I listened and had no words to console the sadness in her heart. To my astonishment she concluded her story, “In all of this I feel God’s presence.”

More recently, I have been walking with a young man who has acute leukemia. Each time I visit with him we pray together. He allows me into his life of suffering. He also tells me, “God is with me and will see me through.”

Neither of these people is well educated or has a background in Scripture or theology. They are being taught from within and through their suffering. Jesus, the teacher, speaks of this inner disposition of the heart in Matthew’s Gospel:

“I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to little ones...Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light (Matthew 11, 25, 28).”

Suffering is part of every life and can evoke reassessment of what is essential. It beckons us to return with all our heart and to recognize the gifts we have received in Christ. Life is an on-going journey of faith and conversion, a learning process in finding Christ as our center. Through his cross and resurrection he sets us free and continues to free

us each and every day.

*Transformation occurs  
as we walk humbly with our God  
in the circumstances  
of our daily lives  
where we meet with reality  
and in reality meet God.*

Transformation occurs as we walk humbly with our God in the circumstances of our daily lives where we meet with reality and in reality meet God. We are invited in the time of prayer to rest in God's presence and allow God's long

loving gaze to pierce through the soil of our soul. We come as we are to a faithful relationship that deepens as we become learners from the seat of wisdom and love. The psalmist clearly speaks of the follower's inner call to transformation when he prays, "For in sacrifice you take no delight, burnt offering you would refuse; my sacrifice is a contrite spirit, a humbled, contrite heart you will not spurn (Ps.51, 18-19)."

A humble heart is a heart constantly returning to the Presence within where it is nourished and prepared to meet the realities of everyday life. In his book *Markings*, Dag Hammarskjöld underlines the connection between the inner and outer realities. "The more faithfully you listen to the voice within you," he writes, "the better you will hear what is sounding outside. And only he who listens can speak. Is this the starting point of the road towards the union of your two dreams—to be allowed in clarity of mind to mirror life and in purity of heart to mold it?"(1)

In this article I will attempt to show the relationship between humility and reconciliation as manifested in the life of Theresa Weber, foundress of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon. Later, I will address the relationship of humility and the challenge of living reconciliation on a personal level and its impact on the present reality of a changing community, church and world.

### **Defining Humility**

**A**n extensive study of humility is not possible in this article; however, some views on humility may be helpful. David Steindl-Rast writes, "To be humble means simply to be earthy. The word 'humble' is related to 'humus', the vegetable mold of topsoil.

It is also related to human and humor...in our best moments humility is simply pride that is too grateful to look down on anyone.”(2)

Joan Chittister sees humility and contemplation as fitting hand-in-glove or as “twins” and explores four dimensions of humility leading to contemplation. “The first calls us simply to recognize the presence of God in our lives,” she writes. “The second level requires us to accept the gifts of others, their God self, their wisdom, their experience, even their direction. The third stage of humility requires us to let go of false

*“Humility is for its part entirely a service to love”*

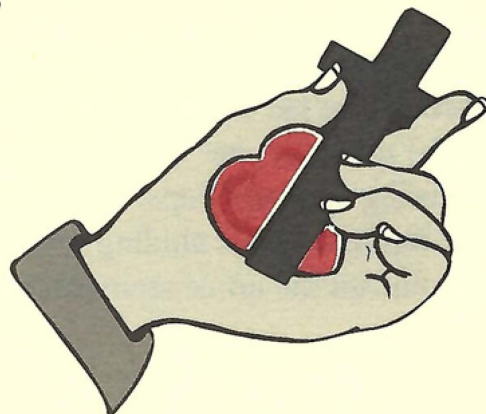
expectations in daily life. The fourth level of humility reminds me to receive others kindly.”(3)

In *Christian Maturity*, Bernard Haring describes the inner workings of humility and its grounding in worship. “Humility is for its part entirely a service to love,” Haring writes. “It is the most wonderful task of humility to open the human heart to love and to prepare it to receive gracious, joy-bringing love.” He continues, “Loving worship is the basic attitude and ultimate root of humility. But adoration itself looks up to the highest who Himself with His love raises the adorer to Himself.”(4)

### **Theresa Weber: A Humble Spirit**

**W**e cannot pinpoint how or when Theresa Weber developed the attitude of humility that characterized her life. But it is clear that humility was based in her relationship with God. During her early years she led a see-saw existence between a spiritual life and worldliness. Her parents were her spiritual guides during this time. On one occasion when she could not concentrate during prayer her mother advised, “Keep your eyes in the book and the words will surely come to your heart.”(5) In time, she meditated on the Passion of Jesus and was drawn to the Eucharistic Mystery. Claude Perrot, Theresa Weber’s biographer and spiritual director, indicates the result of her deepening relationship with God. “The inner light was able to break through and with it came the gift of interior prayer,” he writes. (6)

Another deepening experience came during a Mission she attended with other young women some of whom would join her in her quest of giving herself entirely to following Christ. It was on this occasion she received the gift of seeing herself as



she truly was—sinful and loved. The depth of the experience left her weeping. In speaking of this experience, Perrot focuses on the Fathers of the Church who “teach that the heart humbled by sorrow is also a pure heart.”(7)

Love drew her and in her openness and trust she was able to receive the truth. The truth set her free. Hugh Feiss emphasizes the connection between humility and truth. “Humility is the truth about ourselves, the whole truth—about our weaknesses, our failures, our history, our virtues, our gifts,” Feiss writes. (8) In the recognition of her true identity, Theresa would have the courage to move forward in what would be the mission of reconciliation through adoration and service. A gift had been given and she, like the woman at the well, would go out to tell the world the good news. She and those who walked the same path would be listeners from within, would make do with what was at hand, and would share what they had in the service of others. Their focus, reparation for the injustices and suffering in the world, was lived out by a life of adoration and presence.

Theresa embodied the maxim “charity begins at home.” Charity, the basis of humility, was reflected in her behavior toward others. She was an attentive listener. When decisions were to be made, she often set aside her personal preference for the preference of others. She was also known to extend forgiveness and to encourage forgiveness among the

*“Humility is the truth about ourselves,  
the whole truth  
—about our weaknesses,  
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our virtues,  
our gifts”*

community members. In a conversation with one of the sisters she was noted as saying, “Every person is precious...as precious as the Blood of Christ... Therefore nothing should be too difficult for us so

that all the people for whom Jesus shed his Blood will be saved.”(9) Throughout her short life of 26 years, she gave of herself through her joyful presence, her acceptance of others, and her endurance in suffering and hardships. Like Jesus she walked humbly with her God and through God’s abiding love mirrored the love of Jesus to all. She epitomized the art of reconciliation.

## Contemplation and Service

In the midst of much suffering and the deaths of twenty-three women during the first three years of the foundation, Theresa and the community remained grounded in a life of contemplation and service. They could not move in any other direction. The tug of Love mandates a return of love. Of her it was said, “Without guile or deceit, Mother Theresa gave of herself as she was, and the sisters, increasingly aware of her special gifts of grace, could not help but admire her humility.”

Those who associated with them witnessed the small community’s unified spirit. An incident, which was, on their part, non-violent and reached beyond their own well-being, reflects this spirit. At the time anti-clericalism was rampant. The government was opposed to the spiritual way of life of the small band of women and kept them under constant surveillance. At one point the District Council sent a police officer to examine their home. The account is recorded in *A Time to Sow*, the history of the O’Fallon sisters:

On the day appointed the director of police appeared at the convent door. He demanded entrance and began his examination tour. The Sisters evidenced no hostility whatsoever to the director’s visit. Mother Theresa graciously conducted him through the house. Showing him some artistic artificial flowers the Sisters had made, she selected an assortment for his wife and daughters. Either puzzled or enraptured, the director left the convent somewhat uncertain as to what he should report to the District Council regarding his inspection. The visit had no immediate consequence, and the Sisters were allowed to continue their school according to the previous arrangements.

(10)

Our present *Constitution* reads much differently from the first rule by which the sisters lived. We claim reconciliation to be our charism, one that is only possible to live out with the grace of God. The *Constitution* reads as follows:

Faithful to our heritage and rooted in prayer, we seek to carry forward our mission of reconciliation through the Precious Blood of Jesus as he continues to reconcile all creation to the Father. Called to be a sign of his continuing presence in the world, we strive for personal holiness as we allow Christ to use us as instruments of his redeeming love. (11)

*Living the charism is a day-by-day adventure.  
It has called from me an honesty that is  
both a grace and a challenge.*

Living the charism is a day-by-day adventure. It has called from me an honesty that is both a grace and a challenge. Often it calls me to die to attitudes, resistance, and walls, places where choices are to be made. An inner turning, an inner bending of the will, is facilitated in a love relationship.

Early on in my life if suffering came along, and it did come, I had the capacity for denying it, running away from it or not being ready to look within. I didn't see any value in the possibility of growing through it or being molded by it. The pain eventually became so acute that I was stopped in my tracks. I could not be present to others because I was uncomfortable in my own presence. Something within was not reconciled. Through many retreats that thrust me deeper and through counseling and spiritual direction, I began to experience the love of God. God's love was no longer something I read about or others told me to believe. It was now a reality in mind and heart. I was becoming an adorer of the Presence within as a teaching, loving sometimes disciplining encounter.

### **Humility Learned in Community**

**L**ife does not have to be perfect. The daily events are like grapes in the wine press, invitations to life and growth. On a feeling level, they are certainly not always pleasant. The feelings that emerge are a call to go deeper, to look inward, not to grovel but to see what choices are to be made for life. Caryll Houselander in her classic, *The Risen Christ*, speaks of the gift received in the Resurrection: "The ultimate miracle of Divine Love is this, that the life of the Risen Lord is given to us to give to one another."

The giving of life, the life of the Risen Lord, is unique to each individual. It is within each person that God works the gift of transformation. Love beckons but never coerces. Small experiences can be opportunities for learning the movement from "death to life." Early one morning as I was having breakfast another sister came into

*Love beckons but never coerces.*

the kitchen to have hers. We began a discussion in which a disagreement ensued. Both of us held to our opinion. We parted before

there was any kind of resolution. The incident stayed with me throughout the day. Before retiring I decided to either let the incident go or to return to the sister the next day. I chose the latter. In the morning, I prepared. I recognized my feelings of fear and asked for the courage to approach the sister and ask for time to revisit yesterday's encounter. Then I asked to have the sister pass my way. It is very easy in a large group to avoid the other.

To my dismay, she came along and the words came. I told her about my uneasiness around our encounter. I also told her that I no longer wanted to carry something in my heart that would separate me from her. Then I asked if she had time. We sat at the kitchen table and listened to each other. As we shared, I began to notice a feeling of life coming from within. I told her, "You have given me life. I feel it within." She affirmed it, "And I feel it, too." To me, we had given to each other the life of the Risen Lord. We were reconciled and we were again present to each other with no barriers of the heart standing between us. Peace was restored. I believe humility was present within us again turning and bending for life.

### **Humility and Reconciliation**

**B**rother Roger Schutz in his small pamphlet, *Taize*, reflects on the effects of reconciliation. "In every reconciliation," he writes, "in every communion restored, new vitality and a new springtime come into being. This springtime will mean the end of our mutual condemnation, the old ones and the new ones. And in our turn we will be bearers of friendship and reconciliation for those around us, creators of peace."(12)

There is a dynamic within each of us that calls us from death to life and invites us to share the gift of the Risen Lord, extending it beyond ourselves to the communities in which we live and work. Each time we are not at peace and we approach another with our need for listening and understanding their position, humility is present. Humility is present when an edge of anger is deleted from a comment. Humility is present when forgiveness is extended when one is overlooked or slighted. Humility is present whenever we turn or bend from within and manifest

*Each time we are not at peace  
and we approach another  
with our need  
for listening  
and  
understanding their position,  
humility is present.*

a change of heart toward another in circumstances that are or may seem unjust.

When we take time out to be nourished from within, humility is present. Humility is also present when we take a stand for justice without regard to our own well being. Growing in humility is a step-by-step process. The deeper we go in our relationship with Christ the more is asked of us, always calling us to life.

The issues of today's world are numerous: strife and war, hunger and poverty, terrorism, broken relationships, and animosity and scandal within the church. Added to these are the dehumanization of human beings and the progressive destruction of earth and its atmosphere. Within our families, faith communities, Church and in the workplace and society we find the venue for making choices for life. Each participation in and act of bending and turning out of love transforms the world.

We are called to be light in the darkness, to be creative in the use of the gifts God has given us. Joan Chittister recalls the wisdom of the ages in her book, *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Men and Women*:

If God is anywhere, the greatest writers of the spiritual life have taught for centuries, God is in us, bringing us to life, drawing us incessantly on to that place where we become everything we can be. The soul, that place where the human meets the divine, lives to develop the God-life in us here and now, to be light whatever the darkness that surrounds us, to bring us to a sense of self that satisfies without subsuming everything else in its path. The posture of the soul before a God who dwells in the heart of us to give us life, to give us peace, to give us security is at once a profound bow and at the same time a wide-open embrace of the universe. It is a mix of audacious humility and diffident pride that gives the lie to everything we've ever been told to the contrary about both. (13)

Becoming the mind and heart of Christ is a life-long journey that expands and grows, making each of us God's work of art. Nothing is wasted. The crooks and crannies of our weakness enhance the work of art giving glory to the God who continues to shine through them making them pathways to maturity in Christ. Humility is learned in stages and is a keystone along the way.





### Notes

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3. Joan Chittister, *Illuminated Life* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 2000), pp. 56-58.
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5. Claude Perrot, *Unforgettable and Forever Cherished - The History of the Sisters of the Perpetual Adoration of the Most Precious Blood in Life, Suffering and Death of Mother Theresa Mary Weber*, Translated by August Brockland, Revised by Virginia Volkerding, CPPS, (Archives, O'Fallon, Missouri), p. 15.
6. Ibid. p. 18.
7. Ibid. p. 79.
8. Hugh Feiss, *Essential Monastic Wisdom: Writings on the Contemplative Life* (Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1999), p. 90.
9. Alma Pia Spieler, *ASC Profiles 3: Maria Theresa Weber* (International Study Center of Spirituality, Rome 1995), p. 40
10. Jean Thomas Lake, *A Time to Sow: A History of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood* (Archives, O'Fallon, Missouri), p. 24.
11. Constitutions of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, (O'Fallon, Missouri), p. 8.
12. Brother Roger Schutz, *Taize* (The Thetford Press, Ltd., Thetford Norfolk, 1986), p. 20.
13. Joan Chittister, *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Men and Women* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998), p. 89.



### For Reflection

- Have you heard the inner call to come away and rest awhile?  
If so, have you made plans for a day alone?
- How has the life of the Risen Lord impacted your life? Recall an event when you have bent and turned for the life of another.
- Is there a relationship that needs mending?  
What would keep you from approaching the other?



## Prayer of Discipleship

Lord Jesus Christ,  
a circle of thorns  
crowned your head.

Take the crown  
and place it upon my heart.

Release the nails  
from your hands and feet  
and pierce my heart  
with compassion and love.

Oh my loving Lord,  
intoxicate my heart  
with this wine of mercy,  
may my heart burn  
with this flame of forgiving love.  
May the arrows of your love  
wound me,  
scar me,  
save me,  
heal me.

+

**Based on a Prayer by St. Gaspar del Bufalo**





## Commencement Prayer

Gracious and Loving God,  
I pray for those you have called  
and are being sent forth into the fields  
to cultivate the soil of faith,  
to plant seeds of compassion,  
To harvest hope.

May their spirit always remain calm.  
May their trust in You be most vibrant,  
and forgiveness of their neighbor  
be known far and wide.

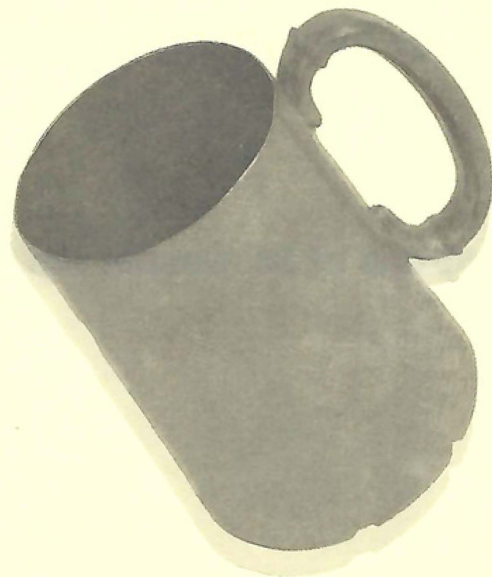
May they work hard,  
active in the ministry of word and witness,  
and stimulate everything through prayer.

+

**Based on the writings of St. Gaspar del Bufalo (#2732)**

Humility is the virtue  
that is dearest to God.  
Even if you only made this meditation:  
Who is God?  
Who am I?  
What beautiful lessons  
such reflections could produce!

**St. Gaspar del Bufalo**



# The Gospel Of Humility

**By Michael Volkmer, CPPS**

*Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him:*

*“If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples,  
and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

John 8, 31-32

**F**reedom seems to be the cry of every human heart. No one wants to be enslaved by others. Yet even in our world today people continue to be enslaved: by repressive governments; by economic systems; even by religious intolerance. The work of justice demands that basic human rights be known and honored. On the other hand, freedom is not without its limits. When the common good demands it, individual freedoms must give way to the greater good of society. For those who follow the way of Jesus, individual freedom is limited by the call to live gospel values, all in some way flowing from the great law of love. “The truth will set you free,” Jesus says. The truth is to be found by remaining true to the words of Jesus.

As disciples of Jesus, when we ask the question about what binds us or holds us back or restrains our freedom, we ask it in a different sense, or perhaps in a deeper sense, than people in the secular world would ask the question. We use the teachings of Jesus as the measure. Things that hinder our freedom can come from within, from our own choices and decisions. We believe that in the waters of baptism we are re-made in the image of Christ and become a new creation. We say that we now live not just for ourselves but that Christ lives in us. The gospel now becomes our guide. The disciple goes the way of the Master.

Jesus did say: “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart (Mt. 11, 29).” St. Paul wrote, “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death of a cross (Phil 2, 5-8).” This famous “kenosis” passage, the “emptying out” of Jesus, giving himself fully and totally for humanity, shows the ultimate act of humility and obedience to the Father’s will.

The disciple goes the way of the Master. We do not have such a gift to give as the Word becoming incarnate, but we do have a precious gift to offer: our will and our choices. St. Peter offers this wisdom: “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for God opposes the proud but bestows favor on the humble (1 Pt 5, 5).” Genuine faith leads to humility because in faith we recognize the Lordship of Christ in our lives. So let us focus on the virtue of humility as a truth that will set us free.

### **The Roots of Humility**

**T**he word “humility” has its roots in the Latin word “humus,” which refers to the earth that is beneath us. So the imagery suggests lowliness or submissiveness by which we recognize that homage is given to someone else, not to ourselves. The truth is that we are humans, not gods.

We are humans with all our weaknesses, not only physical, but

*Genuine faith leads to humility because in faith  
we recognize the Lordship of Christ in our lives.*

emotional and spiritual as well. If we are honest, we are very much aware of our flaws, our failures, and our weaknesses. Yet this does not mean that we beat ourselves up and discount ourselves as worthless creatures. Even as humans we have dignity and value. After all, the Scripture teaches that we are made in the very image and likeness of God. Remember the words of Psalm 8: “Lord our God, what are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals, that you care for them? Yet you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor.” The glory and honor that we have is a reflection of the very glory of God.

The Scripture also teaches that God is love, so our dignity is a reflection of Love itself. Love presumes that the lover is in relationship with another or others. Love of its very nature is self-giving, self-

emptying, and always seeking the good of the other. If we are made in the image of Love, it would be a very false humility to say that human beings are worthless, have nothing to offer, and are only ground to be walked on. No, we have great worth and value because God loved us into creation.

*When we are filled with self,  
there is no room for anyone else  
and no room for God.*

Healthy self-esteem is in keeping with human dignity. The problem is that our secular culture teaches us unhealthy esteem for self that can make us want to focus all the attention on ourselves, as though we were the center of everything. When we are filled with self, there is no room for anyone else and no room for God. Everything revolves around what I want, how I look, my desires, my needs, my enjoyments, my money, my time, and my possessions. It becomes a form of idolatry. What are some behaviors that can result from this kind of pride?

- Seeking praise.
- Wanting to be noticed.
- Wanting to be in control.
- Wanting to have power.
- Wanting to be attractive.
- Showing off.
- Being arrogant.
- Boasting and bragging.
- Putting other people down.
- Discounting the gifts, the efforts, and the talents of others.

Yes, even those in religious life and involved in ministries are not immune. "It's my parish, my preaching, my program, my idea, my ministry, my classroom, my turf. It will surely fall apart without me." But in all of this, where is my need for God? Where is my need for other people? Where is my need for collaboration? Pride can rob me of wonderful gifts and make me seek things that rust and wear away and are forgotten. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides (Mt. 6,33)."

### **The Empty Cup**

**W**e who embrace the spirituality of the Blood of Christ find great meaning in the image of the cup. Unless a cup is designed only for the value of its art, the purpose of a cup is to be filled and to be used for drinking. The cup first has to be empty in order to be filled. So the cup at the altar table is first an empty cup. Then, filled with wine, it is offered to the Father and becomes the cup

of blessing, for the Risen Lord is present to us in this gift. The cup then becomes the shared cup, emptied into the lives of the people who take and drink from it with faith.

The image of the cup could also be used of our lives. We must be empty so that the love of God and the love of other people can fill our lives. If we are filled with self, with our own possessions, desires, and concerns, then the Risen Lord can find no room in us. Humility is an expression of our neediness, our powerlessness, our emptiness, our humanness as we stand with open arms before the Lord. We invite the Lord to fill up whatever is lacking in us.

So it is also true in community life. We welcome the presence of others into our lives so that they can bring to us whatever is found wanting in our lives. If hospitality is to be a charism of our community, then we must show to others that they have a place in our lives and in our homes. We cannot and will not be people of hospitality if we think we are self-sufficient and have no room for the presence of others.

There is another way that humility affects our lives that is reflected in the image of the cup. Remember the gospel passage about the ambition of James and John, wanting to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus when he comes into his glory? Jesus asked them, "Can you drink the cup I shall drink or be baptized in the same bath of pain as I (Mark 10, 38)? He then reminds them and the other disciples, "You know how among the Gentiles those who seem to exercise authority lord it over them; their great ones make their importance felt. It cannot be like that with you (10, 42-43)." Then he goes on to point out that their role is to be as servants of their brothers and sisters.

As disciples, all of us are called to that same vocation: to serve our sisters and brothers. What is the disposition of a servant? To pay

*Humility is an expression of our neediness,  
our powerlessness, our emptiness, our humanness  
as we stand with open arms before the Lord.*

attention to the needs of the ones who are served and to reach out to them with genuine care. We will be hard pressed to take on the role of a servant if we are concerned only with our own wants and needs.

Humility opens our eyes to see beyond self, to drink of the cup of the sufferings of others, and to respond by spending the gifts God has given to us.

We look around at the misguided desires of the secular world and hear the Lord whisper in our ears, "It must not be this way with you." Yet, sometimes it can be a battle. There is such a strong pull within us



to look for glory, for acclaim, for recognition, for praise, for applause. It is true that we all need affirmation and we need to affirm others and name their good qualities. But all of these are gifts and we must always give ultimate glory to the Giver. Priests have many opportunities to receive accolades, which should be received with a gracious “thank you,” while at the same time knowing in the heart that it’s not about “me” but about the one who sent me.

### **Gaspar and the Virtue of Humility**

**I**n one of his letters St. Gaspar writes: “Cultivate the virtue of humility, a virtue which I greatly urge you to develop (Letter 1281).” In another letter he says, “Pray that I become a saint. Let us cultivate ourselves deeply in humility and in prayer, and we shall do great good (Letter 402).” In a letter to a student, he says:

“With respect to thoughts of pride, we can compare them to flies in the summertime. These thoughts are annoying to us, but with the grace of God they do not overcome us. Such thoughts remind us that they are acts in opposition to humility, and the more we multiply acts of humility, we develop a habit of doing good. According to our rule of life, in the morning you should always make an examination on this matter in accordance with the saying on humility that occurs for that day. You should prostrate yourself before God and say, ‘O Lord, who am I and who are you (Letter 1740).’”

We can hear the echoes of that beautiful passage from the prophet Micah in Gaspar’s words. “You have been told, O human, what is good, and what the Lord requires: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God (Mi 6,8).”



### **For Reflection**

- What is the best way to achieve a balance between a healthy sense of self-worth and dignity and a proper recognition of neediness and dependency?
- What might be some daily practices that help us to remember to strive for the virtue of humility?
- Who are models of humility for us? How and why?



# The Path to Transformation: Humility And Identity

**By Marla Gipson, CPPS**

**A**s I look back over the course of my life, I realize that the first half is over. I feel sad and relieved at the same time. Sad for the loss of my idealistic “badges” and relieved to know that life with God is an incredible mystery which I no longer have to attempt to control, fix or even always understand. As I begin the second half of my life, I can now begin to let go, accept, and trust the path of transformation on which God continually lures me to walk. This path has been bumpy and smooth, the ride exhilarating and scary, like a roller coaster. This path has ascended to higher elevation with a breathtaking view and this path has led to sudden drops like an elevator suddenly falling down its shaft.

As I stay on this path I encounter many persons. Some are helpful along the way, pointing out potential pitfalls. Some have left markers to tell you they were once there and all will be well. Some pick me up when I fall. Others accidentally trip me up as they struggle with their own steps. Even a few may deliberately push me off track. Still others just walk steadily along with me, sharing who they are and what they have. Many are not seemingly conscious that they are on any sort of path at all. Hopefully, whoever we are, my wish is that we, individually and collectively, learn to trust this path wherever it takes us, and come to understanding, individually and collectively, the particular purpose for which we are on the journey.

Surprisingly, it is now as I enter the second half of my life that I realize I am on this journey for a purpose previously unknown, namely

the *recovery* of my identity in the life of Christ. I say *recover* because the term itself means to get back, to restore, to regain a normal or usual condition. I am here to recover my true identity, my true self, the self that God as our Creator intended for me to be. God also created Jesus of Nazareth as the channel to help us on our path of recovery. Therefore, God created us to enter into Jesus' dying and rising as a means to recover our true identity. Perhaps if you are not a Christian, God has created you for a different, equally divine purpose. Who is to know? Who can know the mind of God?

### **Baptismal Identity, Humility, and Consecrated Life**

I was asked to write an article about how humility is found in the spirituality and charism of the Sisters of the Precious Blood in Dayton, Ohio, and in the life of our foundress, Mother Brunner. The answer to that question for me lies in my specific identity as a Temporary Professed Precious Blood Sister as lived out within the larger context of my baptismal identity.

In order to fully recover my baptismal identity, I must first begin with the desire to be what God wants me to be. The fruit of this desire as it grows and deepens is humility. Thus, I believe that God wants me to be a temporary professed Sister of the Precious Blood and it is also my desire to be a Sister of the Precious Blood. This identity is the best way, according to God and confirmed by the congregation, for me to enter into the life of Jesus' dying and rising, the larger path of transformation. It is the way that answers for me the big vocation question. It is who I am. It is not, "what do I do?" What I do is *ministry* and is, to be sure, an important question but who I am is a Sister of the Precious Blood, a *specification* of my baptismal identity.

"Who am I?" always remains the larger fundamental question. In order for me to stay on track with that question when events in daily life threaten to derail me, I must remind myself who I am in relation to God. Within myself I must grow and deepen in humility in order to become more fully like Jesus. I must "check in" with that desire to be who God wants me to be. Mysteriously, this growth occurs most when I live through the struggles of being a new member at the age of 45 (a typical mid-life age) in my congregation.

My journey thus far as a religious, though obviously external and even more so as a pastoral associate in a large parish in Cincinnati, is now dropping into a deeper level of internal identity. But why is Precious Blood spirituality part of that identity? Simply put, I believe Jesus shed his precious blood, precious because his loss of blood, his dying, led to his ultimate resurrection. This is the promise and our model for life as humans in relationship with God. As Catholic

Christians we celebrate this mystery every time we celebrate the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Our Dayton CPPS charism is specified by a spirituality that is primarily Eucharistic and motivated by resurrection. Hopefully, through example, sharing and caring, we are life-giving women who in the context of being *vowed* women in the Church witness that Jesus' resurrection is our motivation for getting up in the morning, being who we are and doing what we do. I say *vowed* because we simply chose to enter into Jesus' dying and rising as consecrated women in the Church. (How others chose to enter in Jesus' dying and rising from the stance of their particular vocation is another article.) As consecrated women we are people who muster the humility and courage to walk through the depths of the cross of suffering, to the fullest extent that consecrated women are called to do so with complete faith in resurrection. Hopefully we help those in our daily lives do the same.

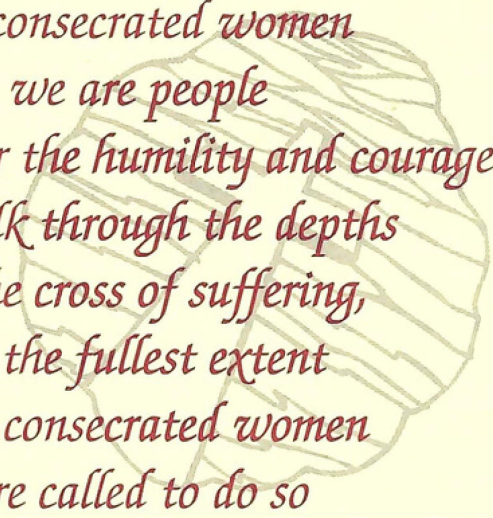
It takes great humility and obedience, especially while walking in a dark abyss, for a person or a religious congregation to come to terms with the cross.

### **The Cross: Identity and Community**

**T**hough I am new to religious life, I am in mid-life. By general population standards, a person in mid-life is neither young anymore nor old. A person in mid-life is considered to have gained a certain measure of maturity, knowledge, and wisdom and yet still have much physical energy. But in religious life a person in her mid-forties is considered very young. Is it that I am so young as most in the community think I am or is it that most are older than they think they are? If I am, for the most part, competent, educated, mature,

organized, decent at relationships, am I perceived as so self-sufficient that I don't need formative help?

Clearly, I am new in the lived experience of the culture and way of life as a Sister of the Precious Blood. When and what type of formation do I need that would



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help me to more adequately understand this culture and way of life? Where is the balance between the need to be mentored and the need to distinctly live out my own sense of being a Precious Blood Sister or parish minister? In general, how does the community understand or not understand adult women who enter their ranks? What is the diverse life experience of those who do enter?

I did not come as a beginner at human experience, nor professional experience and even spiritual experience. As a Gen X'er in religious life and in the Church, my life experience too is just different. My experience as a convert to Catholicism 11 years ago gives me a post-Vatican II experience with the Church and parish life. As a serious spiritual seeker I had a high degree of exposure to a wide variety of spiritual practices but Jesus drew me to Catholicism with its mystics, contemplative life, religious practices, theology and of course, religious life.

How are all these identity issues and experiences part of my personal crosses and, at the same time, the congregation's crosses? All of these issues of age and generation in religious life and in the larger Church require humility. Humility arrives with the conviction that, in spite of the differences, I have been conscripted to be in the life form of religious life within the Church. It is the most basic home for me that I would never have imagined for myself in younger days. It is the place to work out my salvation and recover my true self. The struggle of working through identity and generational differences is, for me, the process itself. It *is* entering into Jesus' dying and rising. It *is* the path of transformation.

### **The Cross in Ministry**

**T**he cross that teaches humility also looms large in my ministry. On my first day as a pastoral associate at Our Lady of Visitation in Cincinnati, I was confronted with the reality of the sex abuse scandal. The priest who hired me was removed and put on administrative leave that same day and is still involved in an unresolved active civil case. Six weeks later a friend and mentor was also removed from the priesthood. This particular mentor/priest is the biological great-grandson of Mother Brunner, our foundress! He was the pastor of the parish I was active in prior to entering the congregation and he was highly supportive of my journey into religious life.

Two years and one faith crisis later, I am seeing the light of day. I am beginning to see the inner workings of God again and see the lessons I have learned through this adversity. I understand resurrection in a whole new way. My call as a Precious Blood Sister is to witness to what I have personally learned with our parishioners who also struggle.

My call is to coordinate and empower parishioners not to be overly dependent on the clerical office of the priesthood. My call is to preach through my actions a life-giving presence of Jesus in our fractured Church. I am called to bring parishioners a deeper understanding of their baptismal identity and a trust in a God who is with them on the journey. I am called to witness to the humility that Jesus had when he said yes to the cross by saying yes to my own crosses, especially when I don't understand the meaning of them. Precious Blood spirituality captures the dying and rising of Jesus and therefore is a powerful force for reconciliation in our Church and resurrection of the body of Christ.

### **Mother Brunner**

**F**inally, how can humility be found in Mother Brunner? In the final act of her life, call it the second half or the third act, she embarked on a new journey. She sought her identity in the Precious Blood of Jesus. Whether she knew it or not, she was living out her baptismal identity, traveling to see Gaspar, traveling back, feeding the poor, praying before the Blessed Sacrament, attracting other young women to join her, and praying specifically for the priests.

Mother Brunner embraced humility through obedience to her final call to seek God more fully in her later years. She gave herself over to God's call, never knowing what would come of it. She was authentically being and doing what she believed God wanted of her. She remained true to God and to herself. She followed her path of transformation, the by-product of which was the emergence of a religious order founded in America. By her fruit, you will know her. She continues to live on in a visible, tangible way through our congregation. My prayer is simply to continue in her same spirit, both personally and as a congregation, and to obediently humble ourselves in death so that we may continue to have life.



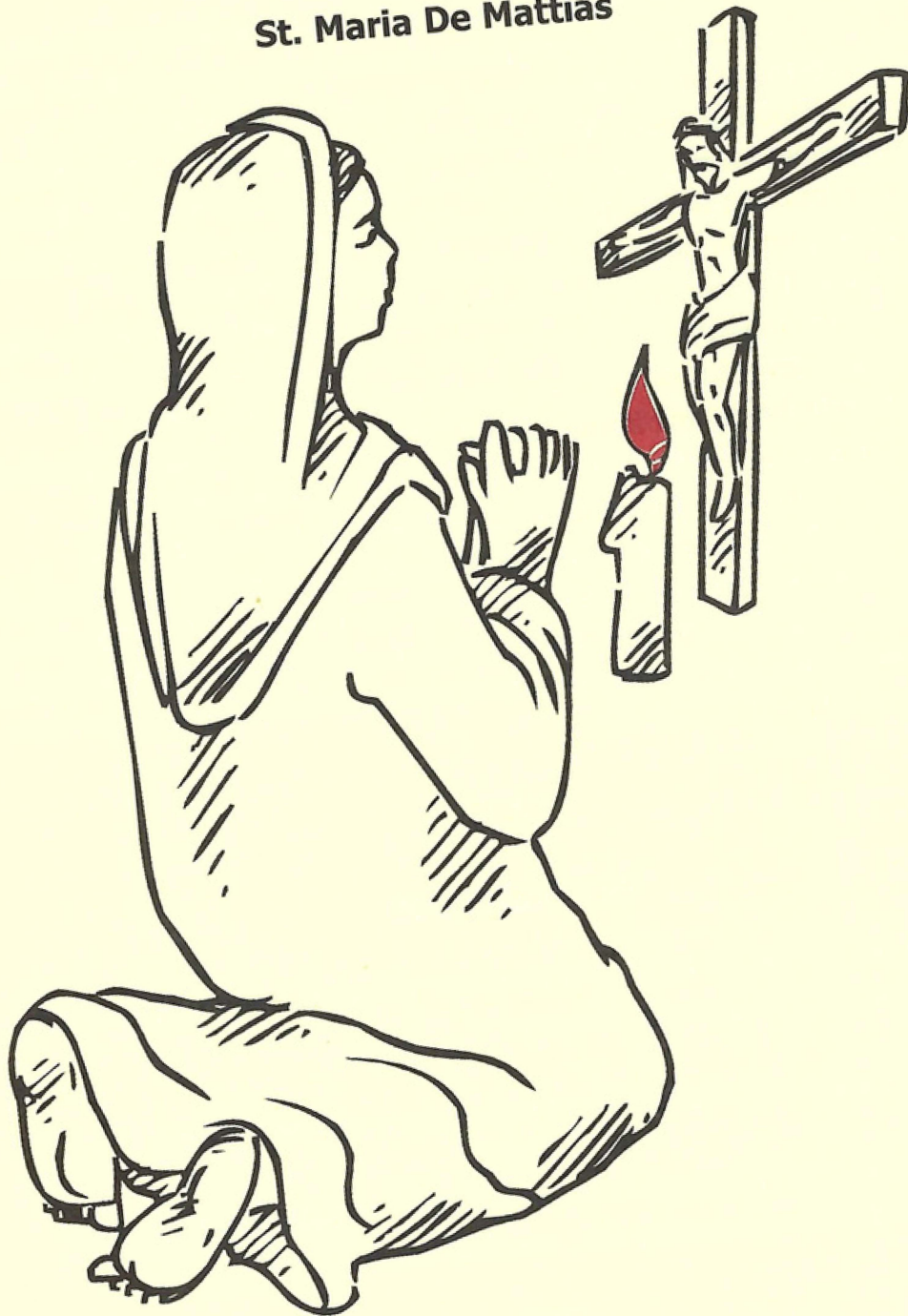
### **For Reflection**

- How do I view my baptismal identity? What does my vocation have to do with my baptismal identity?
- What does this mean for how I do ministry as a religious?
- Where is humility found in the roles I play (ministry, religious or apostolic life, community life, married life etc)?



With patience  
and humble prayer  
to God,  
everything can be  
accomplished.

**St. Maria De Mattias**



# Humility Is Spelled C-o-u-r-a-g-e

**By Loretta Gegen, ASC**

A few days after I was invited to write this article, I was returning to the convent in a community car late at night from an out-of-town meeting. Whoever had used the car before me had left the radio set on a country music station. When I turned on the radio a rich voice was singing, "O Lord, it's hard to be humble."

That refrain echoed in my mind for several days. Not only is it difficult to be truly humble, but also it has become increasingly difficult to find articles that challenge one to be humble. It has become a blurred virtue in our society where power, prestige, and possessions form the trilogy that denotes success. Ruthless aggressiveness seems to be the foundation for that success. To reach the top of the ladder of success often means trampling on those who get in the way. Our evolving culture seems to be becoming one where the traits of humility, meekness, and truth are being swept under the rug of life. Unfortunately, humility, gentleness, and meekness have become words that have taken a negative spin and often convey the idea of self-deprecation and personal weakness. Genuine humility, on the other hand, is being courageous in knowing, embracing and living truth in all aspects of life.

It takes a courageous person to recognize and openly admit, even to self, that all achievements hinge on God-given gifts. It takes courage for a person to see brokenness in society and in the environment and to extend a hand to improve situations even in some small way. It is a courageous person who learns genuine humility in claiming and enduring the sufferings and limitations of life that are a part of the human condition. It takes courage to embrace one's God-given gifts and to live in readiness to use those gifts for the good of others as well



*Genuine humility, is  
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as oneself. It takes boundless courage to think truth, speak truth, and claim truth in all relationships and events of daily living.

Jesus showed us that living humbly is not for weak or cowardly individuals. He referred to himself as being meek and humble. Anyone who is acquainted with the life of Jesus knows that Jesus was neither weak nor cowardly. As we follow him through the pages of Scripture we see that Jesus faced and handled challenges that few others will ever have to meet or endure. The courage of his message permeated all that he said and did. It was a power that drew its strength from the respect, courtesy, and gentleness that he extended to others. Far from conveying the idea of weakness, his humility in action showed strength of character that Jesus invited others to learn from him: "Come to me... Learn from me... I am meek and humble."

### **A Humble Saint: Maria De Mattias**

**O**ne can become aware of the virtue of humility lived in a courageous manner by reading the writings of the saints and by seeing their words exemplified throughout their biographies. Some may wonder how there can be value in studying the writings of persons of different cultures and lifestyles who lived hundreds of years ago. Experience has taught us, however, that reading the lives of the saints and studying their writings can certainly inspire us and serve as spiritual models for us. As we absorb their writings, we are gifted by their wisdom and insights as we journey ever closer to the same God whom they loved and served. Their experience of God in their lives can serve as heroic examples to help us launch out into the mystery and uncertainties of our spiritual journey. A humble and formative reading of the lives and writings of the saints enables us to grasp what is foundational without being disturbed by what is peculiar to the saint's life and times.

It was the mission sermon of St. Gaspar Del Bufalo that pointed the steps of St. Maria De Mattias on the journey she was to follow in her vocation through life. It was St. Gaspar who approved Venerable John Merlini to serve as spiritual director and to guide St. Maria for over 40 years in her courageous life of recognizing, claiming, and witnessing truth within herself and as she saw it in her "dear neighbor."

Maria lived and ministered at a time in history when the cross was a constant companion. Families were torn apart as Napoleon conscripted

the men to fight in his army. Many who refused to respond to his call fled to the hills. Banditry and plundering of villages were at an all time high. Women were uneducated and struggled to hold the family together. Schools were unknown in the small rural villages. Only a few boys were able to receive an education by boarding in Rome or in other large cities at great sacrifice on the part of other family members. Poverty was a way of life for most people of the era.

Maria must have wondered very often where God's hand was in all the sufferings she saw around her. The evils of society were far from that beautiful order of things that the God of love had ordained for his creation. In her own humble way, Maria faced the truth of her surroundings and examined the gifts God had given to her that could help to improve the plight of the suffering and poor of her era. She knew deep within her heart that God was working quietly and invisibly in all things despite the evils that permeated society. Maria was determined to do what she could to help God's people. She was convinced that Divine Providence would supply all that was necessary for her as she began her work with small things, humble things, courageously doing what she recognized as God's will for her.

Those familiar with the Interior Castle of St. Teresa of Avila may find Teresa's imagery of the silkworm an appropriate one as they reflect on Maria's humble and

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goal-oriented life. "The humble-looking silkworm on the mulberry leaves is spinning quietly but accomplishing something beautiful at the same time." So too did Maria work quietly, humbly and steadily as she accomplished so many beautiful things as her life unfolded.

### **Humbly Accepting God's Gifts**

**L**ike other women of her era and locality, Maria had no formal education. It was from her father that she learned the rudiments of the basic skills that she possessed. It was from him that she learned to recognize and appreciate learning and to gain knowledge of Scripture and prayer. It was from him that she also grew in

understanding that God gave her gifts to her and that her accomplishments resulted from cooperating with God's grace. She learned that humility required that she take whatever she had been favored with, whatever she was, and use it in the best way possible. She learned the source of all good gifts and gratefully rejoiced in being gifted.

God's gifts and her dreams grew gradually within Maria. Much like the small hazelnut that Julian of Norwich describes in her Showings,

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Maria was small and insignificant in God's great cosmic plan. Buried deep within her heart, however, God had placed all that was needed for his will to be accomplished in her life and all that he wanted done for his people. One small step at a time, Maria courageously moved forward to accomplish that dream buried deep within her heart of founding the Congregation of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ.

As Maria began her work in the small rural and mountain village of Acuto, Italy, the needs of the people seemed to mushroom. She knew more clearly with each passing day that she could not meet the needs of her "dear neighbor" alone. She needed others to help her immediately in the work that she knew God was asking her to do. As she began sharing her life and ministry with others, genuine humility wrapped in courage and the tender love for God and her "dear neighbor" were the hallmarks that were to characterize the remainder of her life.

In spite of her own limitations and weakness, Maria grew in her understanding of God's infinite and unconditional love for her and for all people during the many hours that she knelt in prayer and meditation at the foot of the crucifix. She welcomed the many women who asked to join her in her work even though they were poor and uneducated individuals who bore the scars of the deprivations of the times. Just as Julian of Norwich saw in the tiny hazelnut its potential to become a beautiful and productive tree, Maria also saw in the women around her their potential to accomplish much as instruments in the hand of God.

Maria taught her first companions to read and write, as well as Christian Doctrine and the principles of religious life. She accepted

them in the totality of who they were and gave God full space to work out his divine plan within them. She gave them support and encouragement by such words as, “Don’t worry about anything because with God’s help everything will work out (Letter II: 340).” “Do not fear, little flock, the work is God’s work and the Lord will always triumph over difficulties (II: 233).” “With patience and humble prayer to God, everything can be accomplished (III: 492).”

### **Prayer Teaches Humility**

**F**or Maria, prayer was not just an add-on to the end of the day. Her life was lived out of prayer. It gave Maria a centeredness that held all the activities of the day together. She viewed life from inside her serene and wordlessly prayerful heart and exemplified Christ-like humility and love in the manner in which she treated people and events. By her example she showed her Sisters that if they spent time first with Jesus, they would be able to possess and carry the mind of Christ with them as they went about their daily ministries. They could gain the mind of Christ by spending time at the foot of the cross as the mother of Jesus did. Like Mary they were to stand with hearts humbly open to listen and to learn the price that Jesus paid for those whom they would be serving during the day. Maria wrote, “We have to begin early enough in the mornings if we are to succeed in doing things right and giving time to prayer.... If you do all this you will see that God will help you and give you consolation in everything (I: 24).”

Maria wanted prayer to be kept at the top of all priorities. In the language of Julian of Norwich, Maria wanted to be, and wanted her companions to be, “oned with God.” She knew that in prayer at the foot of the crucifix one learned the great love of Jesus, the model for service to the “dear neighbor.” With prayer Maria knew that one could simply and lovingly assess situations and humbly trust that all would be well. Without prayer, focus turns inward on oneself and breeds pride. Being “oned with God” in prayer, one can rest humbly and allow one’s affections to become fused with God’s affection. As Maria wrote to one of her first companions, “Never cease sitting at the Lord’s feet, listening to the voice of his dear love always calling you to be more and more one with him (I: 15).”

As Maria knelt in prayer before her crucified Lord, she learned that the humility and meekness of Jesus led him to do always the will of his Father who sent him. Maria also wanted to obey the divine will in everything. She searched for that will as she sought the guidance of her spiritual director, as she humbly looked for God’s will in prayer, and as she sought permissions and bowed in obedience to all the authorities to whom she was subject in carrying out her many responsibilities. Her

letters reveal that she had to send reports and to request permissions continually from Father Merlini, from the bishops of the dioceses, and from the parish pastors and town governing councils in the places where she assigned her Sisters. It took much courage to search for the will of God buried often deeply within their directives. It took courage and she found her peace in trusting that God's will for her lay in her obedience to legitimate authorities.

From a distance, it does not seem like Maria enjoyed the same simple "stress relief" in her obedience as did St. Theresa of Liseaux when she wrote in her autobiography, "Isn't it extraordinary what a lot of nervous stress one can avoid by being obedient." For Maria, obedience was often another cross to accept, another opportunity to seek her peace that was buried deep within the cross. She reminded herself



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and her Sisters "We can be sure that we will win many souls for Jesus Christ if we act in obedience.... I have my cross which is very dear to me because it comes through obedience (II: 312)." Again she wrote, "We must find our peace in the will of God and not in wanting perforce to have things our own way (VI: 1221)."

### **Learning Humility Through Suffering**

**M**aria's humility enabled her to face life's sufferings head-on. She recognized that suffering is a part of the human condition. She learned to embrace this truth and to accept the crosses of life in the strength of the Lord. She looked past her own sufferings and recognized how small they were as she knelt before her crucified Lord and meditated on all he suffered in embracing his cross and shedding his blood for humankind. She tried to help her companions face their sufferings, to embrace life's crosses by remaining

*Maria's humility enabled her to face  
life's sufferings head-on.*

close to the cross of Jesus. She taught them to meditate on the Divine Blood shed for their redemption and to carry their crosses humbly and willingly by simply putting one foot in front of the other day after day. Maria had learned early in life that "some crosses there must be among us. If it is not one then it will be another (II: 257)." She recognized the cross as being the mark of a true Christian.

Maria's letters are sprinkled with quotations about accepting the crosses of life. She acknowledged this when she wrote, "They tell me that I am always talking about the Cross. Believe me that it is not just for form's sake, but because of the real love in my heart and the high esteem I have for that adorable standard! Indeed we can say in all truth that whoever shares in the sufferings of Jesus Christ is always immensely honored (II: 210)."

In all truth, Maria was honored in sharing those sufferings. The documentation presented in the process of her recent canonization shows how the humility with which she bore her crosses was the thread that wove the other virtues together in her life. Her self-knowledge was based on the realization that she was weak and insecure of herself. In her humility, on the other hand, she embraced the truth that with God's help she could accomplish all that was God's will for her to accomplish. It was in following God's will that she became the prophetic woman and the instrument of change in the lives of so many people. Her great courage in making changes that ran counter to the social conditions of her era helped to improve and enrich the lives of others. By educating and attending to the needs around her she helped others to recognize their dignity. She knew also that those changes helped to bring about that beautiful order of things that God lovingly intended for all people.

Maria recognized that the changes that brought about good for others were often the changes that brought about many of the crosses in her own life. The truth of her convictions and her belief that she was following God's will, however, enabled her to write, "...in certain circumstances we have to take risks, and repeat with our Father [Gaspar], 'Extraordinary ministry and vocation call for extraordinary grace.' Nothing would have been achieved up till now if we had not proceeded with this conviction (VI: 1190)." In her own humble and courageous way, Maria took many risks.

*In her own humble and courageous way,  
Maria took many risks.*

Because she followed her dream, her charism and vision continue to serve the needs of God's people on all six of the inhabited continents through the Congregation of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ that she founded. The humility that served as the foundation of Maria's life reflects the well-known words in *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena, "Humility expresses itself in praise of God and charity toward others." Adoration and service to her "dear neighbor" are the realities that characterized the entire life of St. Maria. Such was her humility. Such also was her life that would enable her to understand very well the refrain of the country singer, "O Lord, it's hard to be humble." The difficult road that Maria walked could only have been traveled with a humility spelled C-O-U-R-A-G-E.



### **For Reflection**

- What ideas from this article have added meaning to your understanding of the virtue of humility? In what ways do you find the practice of humility difficult in our present day culture?
- What aspects of the humility of St. Maria resonate most clearly within your heart? What experiences in your life required your courageous humility?
- Which events in your life can help you grow in humility if you know, embrace, and courageously live the truth in which those matters are wrapped?



Humility expresses itself  
in praise of God  
and charity toward others.

**St. Catherine of Siena**





## Contributors

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