

Some Thoughts on “Humility”

Humility comes from the word, “humus” meaning earth.

Unlike the Uriah Heap of David Copperfield, a spineless person, humility is best found in the images of Moses, who is said to be the “most humble of men”; or of Jesus Christ, who said, “I am meek and humble of heart.” Each was a substantial leader in his day; yet each referenced their life and accomplishments with respect to Yahweh, or the Father.

It is for this reason that humility is the ultimate example of the mystery of the Kingdom of God. It is paradoxical. To be humble is to grow in strength and stature, not through one’s own efforts, but through God who is working through us. It is recognizing that it is not primarily through our own gifts and talents that an accomplishment takes place, but through God, the source of all goodness, who has given us this ability. In other words, it is attributing to God, and others, the reason for one’s abilities and achievements.

Teresa of Avila put it well, “Humility is truth; it is recognizing who we are before God, no more no less.”

Humility does allow for proper self esteem. It is only a matter of attributing the praise or accolade to its primary source, namely, the support of others, and ultimately, God. Recognizing the efforts of others; parents, family, a team or community, and giving them credit as well, is to practice humility. Finally, accepting one’s part in some accomplishment through a simple “Thank you” is also a healthy way of growing in self esteem, and paying tribute to God for what He has done through you.

We shape this virtue in our lives in practical ways. For instance, it is found in words such as “our”, “we” and “us”, as opposed to “I”, “mine” or “me.” It is deepened by attentive listening. It is found in patience, or helping others first.

In the final analysis, it is recognizing that God is the creator, we are the created. This definition brings us back to the root of the word, “earthiness,” which finds its Scriptural source in the words in the Book of Genesis, “Remember, you are dust and unto dust, you shall return.”