

It was Saint Augustine who said “There is something in humility which strangely exalts the heart.” Humility does seem to be a peculiar puzzle defying our modern times. Its hallmarks are opposite the worst of our societal characteristics of entitlement, selfish behavior, and the autonomous self. Yet Christianity is full of such seemingly incompatible statements as “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the Earth” (Matt 5:5) and “many who are last will be first” (Matt 19:30). Anyone wonders how humility could get you anywhere. Pride indeed does seem to rule the world. But humility is strange in its effect upon the person and others. It works rather quietly out of sight, yet builds in a person what pride can prevent: grace, the life of God within us.

It seems like a tale a father should tell to his children by bedside. A year ago this last week it was Pope Benedict who announced his resignation. The Pope, merely a man, though possessing the authority of the Church, understood his strength to be waning. Two paths to take but only one the right way, only with humility was he able to give up heaven’s keys, and be in peace with the decision. It is not often a leader with such great power will relinquish it because he feels incapable of what is necessary. But Pope Benedict realized what needed to be done: “After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty”, he told us. Pope Benedict surrendered to God, to himself, and the world which is what humility is all about.

His openness was essential because it allowed the mere consideration of such a decision. He let go and prayed to God about what he should do. He also saw his service as ultimately to God through the people he led. And he knew he was merely a man, equal among everyone, and growing old enough, that it was time. His serenity with the decision is a testament to the power of humility and God’s grace.

Such humility that recognizes equality, a dependence on God, and the life of service can help reveal the truth to us. It’s perplexing in a worldly view but if we surrender ourselves, we will know ourselves in the light of God’s truth. When we grow in humility, we become liberated from what blinded us. We are often unaware of what falsely leads us such as superiority, misguided pleasures, or stubbornness. Yet if we can see the need for God in such struggles, then were on the right path. There is indeed something about humility which fully allows us to be ourselves. Because the blinds are opened to what we unknowingly or purposefully blocked off, God surprises us with what we were missing. A humble heart will lead the person to the truth.

We are still recognizing this and always will be. The importance of prayer and the sacraments need to be stressed here. The Catechism reminds us that “humility is the foundation of prayer” (2259). It asks us whether in prayer “we speak from the height of our pride and will or out of the depths of a humble and contrite heart” (2259). Through prayer, humility can be strengthened. Without turning to God in prayer, Pope Benedict might not have admitted his frailty and found the courage and trust to renounce the papacy. And the sacraments, specifically the Eucharist and Reconciliation, give us a lesson in humility each time we participate. We

acknowledge that we need Christ in both, and understand that we are broken in some way and in need of His healing and grace.

As a model of humility, Jesus can guide us to be His humble Knights. The surrendering which humility calls for was made manifest in His life. It is part of what brought others to follow him. Pope Francis once said “Jesus doesn’t need an army to cast away the demons; He has no need of pride, of force, of arrogance” because the strongest light is also the meekest light, Jesus and his humble word. It is strange how humility exalts the heart, as St. Augustine said earlier, perhaps because the world would never guess it.

And so in our lives, may we have the humility to recognize that we belong to God. And the humility to recognize we are always sons and brothers, the humility to see the child within us, and the humility to see this in everyone. In the end such things may make the difference.