



**Published by**  
Saint Shenouda  
the Archimandrite  
Coptic Orthodox  
Monastery  
Sydney, Australia

**Address**  
8419 Putty Rd,  
PUTTY, NSW 2330

**Phone/Facsimile**  
(+612) 65 79 7093

**Email**  
pimonakhos  
@copticmail.com

**Website**  
Stshenouda  
monastery.org.au

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# PI MONAKHOS THE MONK

## ΠΙΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ

A monthly newsletter with monastic issues for today's youth

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## EXAMPLES OF HUMILITY

*By: H.H. Pope Shenouda*



**St. Anthony used to conquer the devils with humility.** Whenever they gathered around him, he used to address them humbly, "Ye strong, what do you want with me who am weak?" and he prayed, "Save me, O God, from those who think I am of any worth though I am too weak to fight even the smallest of them." When the devils heard him raising such a prayer full of humility, they could not endure but vanished like smoke.

**St. Macarius the Great too conquered the devil with humility.** Once, the devil appeared to St. Macarius and said, "Ah from you Macarius! One thing you do that we do not! You fast and we eat nothing, You keep awake and we do not sleep. You inhabit the desert and wilderness and we also; but you overcome us with one thing". The saint asked what that thing was and the devil answered, "It is with your humility that you overcome us."

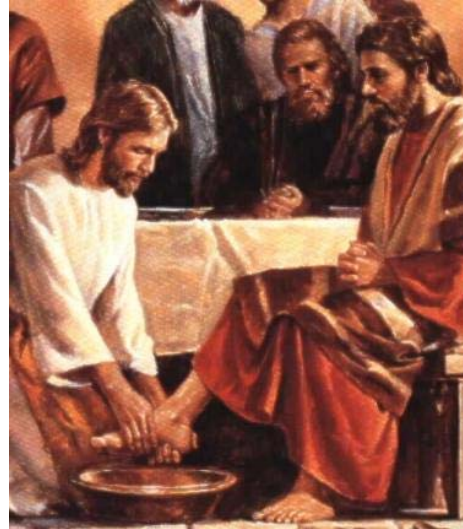
**Humility overcomes the devil for many reasons, among which are the following;** First: because the devil is not humble and humility reminds him of his pride which was the cause of his fall. Second: because humility reminds him of the image of Jesus Christ who emptied Himself and took upon Himself the form of a slave in order to save humanity. Mere memory of these, troubles him and he departs. Third: because the humble person, feeling his weakness, seeks the power of God to help him in fighting the devil and this is the thing which the devil fears most.

So, I wrote once in my notes the following words: "The devil said to God, 'Leave to me the strong, I am responsible for them; but the weak I cannot overcome because when they find that they have no power, they fight me with Your power'".

**The story of St. Sarapamon the Veiled (Abu Tarhaa) proves that casting out the devils can be effected by humility.** The daughter of the ruler Muhammid Ali called Zahra was possessed by a devil and they brought her to the Patriarch to pray for her so that the devil might



be cast out. The Patriarch said to them humbly, "I do not have such a gift, go to St. Sarapamon the Veiled". When they went to him he said humbly, "My prayers for her are not sufficient." He required the cross of the patriarch to cross her with and said, "By the blessing of this cross, she will recover". He meant by this to attribute her recovery to the Patriarch not to himself. Thus she recovered because the devil could not bear such humility.



## SEEING ALL MEN EQUAL

The brethren said, "One of the old men said, 'I have toiled for twenty years that I might see all men equally. How can a man attain to this measure, and when, and by what means? Give us a demonstration concerning this matter.'"

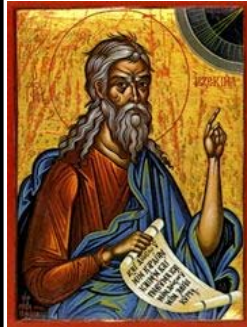
The old man said, "It is only the perfect men who attain to this measure, and according to what the Fathers say, without contemplation in silence, prayer, great conflicts, and humility, no man can attain this. There is a similarity to this demonstration in the case of natural parents, for as they regard all their children in the same way, and as they love them all equally, and pity and spare all of them alike, even though there be among the great and small, and healthy and sick, and righteous and sinners, and good looking and bad looking, so the strenuous Fathers after the labors and the contests which they have passed through during long periods of time spent in silent and solitary retirement, regard all men, both the righteous and the sinners, in the same way, and they love them all alike and without distinction. As God makes the sunlight to fall upon all men, both upon the righteous and upon sinners, even though he loves the righteous for their righteousness, yet He shows most compassion upon the sinners. The coming of our Lord was for the sake of sinners, for He said, 'I did not come to call the righteous...'"

*(From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers)*



## ON HUMILITY

*By St Dorotheos of Gaza*



The first kind of humility is to hold my brother to be wiser than myself, and in all things to rate him higher than myself, and simply, as that holy man said, to put oneself below everyone. The second kind is to attribute to God all virtuous actions. This is the perfect humility of the saints. It is generated naturally in the soul by the performance of the commandments. It is just like a tree bearing much fruit: it is the fruit that bends the branches and lowers them down, but when there is no fruit, the branches point upwards and grow straight.

There are certain kinds of trees which never bear any fruit as long as their branches stay up straight, but if stones are hung on the branches to bend them down they begin to bear fruit. So it is with the soul. When it is humbled it begins to bear fruit, and the more fruit it bears the lowlier it becomes. So also the saints; the nearer they get to God, the more they see themselves as sinners. I remember once we were speaking about humiliation and one of the great lights a nobleman from Gaza, hearing us say, 'The nearer a man is to God the more he sees himself to be a sinner', was astonished, and said, 'How is this possible?' I said to him, 'Master of the First Rank, tell me, how do you regard yourself in respect to the other citizens here?' And he said, 'I regard myself as great, and first among the citizens.' I said then, 'If you went away to Caesarea, how would you regard yourself then?' 'I would value myself somewhat less than the great folk there.' So I said, 'If you went away to Antioch, what then?' And he replied, 'I would regard myself as one of the common people.' I said, 'And if you went from the city of Caesarea into the presence of the Emperor, what would you think of yourself then?' He replied, 'I should think of myself as just one of the poor.' Then I said to him, 'There you are! In the same way, the saints, the nearer they approach to God, the more they see themselves as sinners!' Abraham, when he saw God, called himself 'dust and ashes'. And Isaiah said, 'Unhappy am I, for my lips are unclean.' Similarly Daniel was in the lion's den and Habakkuk came to him with a meal and said to him, 'Accept the food, which the Lord has sent you.' And Daniel replied, 'For the Lord has remembered me!' He had great humility in his heart when he was in the lion's den because they did not devour him once and for all, not even afterwards, and so with astonishment he cried, 'the Lord has remembered me'.

Do you see the humility of the saints and how their hearts were set on it? Even when messengers were sent straight from God to them to help them they were not turned away from humility but fled from self-glorification. As men clad all in silk flee if a filthy rag is thrown at them, so that their noble robes will not be stained, so the saints, clad in virtue, take flight from human glory lest they be stained by it. Those who desire that sort of glory are like the naked man who



always wishes to find a few rags, anything at all, to cover his shame. So too one who is naked of virtue desires to be praised by men. Therefore the holy men who are sent from God to help men, do not let go of humility. Hence on one occasion Moses said, 'I beseech thee, Lord, send another more eloquent than me for I am hard-voiced.' Jeremiah said on another occasion, 'I am a child!' So every single one of the saints, as I have said, acquired this humility from the fulfilment of the commandments. No one can explain how this comes about, how humility is generated in the soul. Unless a man learns this by experience, he cannot learn it by verbal teaching.

One day Zosimos was talking about humility. There was a certain sophist present who, hearing what he said, wanted to enquire more deeply into it and he said, 'Tell me how you can reckon yourself a sinner. Do you not see that you are a holy man? Do you not see that you have already acquired virtue? Do you not see that you are fulfilling the Commandments? How can it be that doing all these things you still reckon yourself a sinner?' The old gentlemen did not quite know how to answer, and he said, 'I do not know how to explain it to you, but it is quite true.' The sophist then brushed this aside and repeated his request to know *how* this could be true. But the old gentlemen still could not find a way of explaining it and began to say with his usual holy simplicity, 'Do not try and confuse me. I tell you this is exactly how I feel.' Since I saw the old gentlemen hesitating over how to reply, I said to him, 'Is this not rather like sophistics or medicine? When a man is studying it carefully and is practising it little by little, by doing the work he acquires the state of mind proper to a sophist or a doctor, and he is unable to say and does not know how to explain how little by little he was led into that state of mind, for the soul absorbed it unnoticeably. The same sort of thing is found as regards humility; the work of fulfilling the Commandments generates a state of humility and the process cannot be explained in words.' When he heard this, Abbot Zosimos was glad and embraced me and said, 'You have found the answer; it is as you say.' The sophist, hearing this, had his difficulty laid to rest and accepted the explanation. For the elders used to say that by doing certain things we intend to cultivate humility; when the state of true humility is generated in the soul, no one can find an adequate description of it.

*(From: Dorotheos of Gaza - Discourses and Sayings, Cistercian Publication)*





## WHAT THE FATHERS SAID ABOUT HUMILITY

### ***St Anthony:***

Abba Anthony said, "I saw all the snares of the enemy laid out upon the ground, and I groaned and said, 'Who can escape from these?' And I heard a voice say to me, 'Humility enables a man to escape from these snares.'"

### ***St Macarius:***

They used to say that on one occasion Abba Macarius was passing along the road when Satan met him. The devil wished to cut him down with the axe which he held in his hand. But he was unable to do so, and he said to him, "Macarius, I am dragged along by you with great force, but I cannot overcome you. Now, behold, everything which you do I can do also. You fast, and I never eat at all. You watch, and I never go to sleep, and there is one thing only which you do conquer me." Then Macarius said to him, "And what is that?" Satan said, "It is your humility, for it is because of this that I cannot vanquish you." Then Macarius spread out his hands in prayer. The devil was no more seen.

### ***Abba Simon:***

On one occasion a certain governor arranged to see Abba Simon, and the clergy told him beforehand, saying, "Father, make yourself ready, for a certain Governor has heard of your life and works, and he wishes to come and be blessed by you"; and the old man said to them, "I am ready." Then the old man went in and took in his hand some bread and cheese, went out to the door, sat down there, and he changed about from place to place eating. When the Governor came with his companions, and saw him sitting and eating, they despised him, saying, "So this is the monk of whom I have heard!" They left him and departed.

### ***Abba Arsanius:***

They used to say that on one occasion a few early, white figs came to Scete, but because they were nothing of importance they did not send any to Abba Arsenius, not wishing to insult him. When the old man heard of this he did not come to the congregation, saying, "You separated me from the blessed gift which God sent to the brethren because I was unworthy to partake of it." When the old men heard this they profited greatly by his humility. The priest went, carried some of the figs to him, and brought him to the congregation with great joy.



## TREADING THE TIGHTROPE

By: Fr Antonious Kaldas

One of the hardest sins to defeat is pride. One of the hardest virtues to acquire is humility. Yet humility is an essential virtue, for without it, all that we do is worthless. The devil's first sin is said to have been pride:

*Isaiah 14:12 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! 13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' 15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.*

I cannot pretend to understand what might go on in the mind of luminous angelic creature, but I can certainly see a reflection of it going on inside myself, a spirit tied to a physical and limited body. If anything, it is even more laughable for a human being to be "proud". No wonder the devil despises us.

Humility, as I have often said, is Truth: no more, no less. The old philosopher's proverb, "**Know thyself**" is a thumbnail sketch of the road to true humility. If we lived in absolute truth, never once deceiving ourselves or allowing ourselves to be deceived by others, then we would live in absolute humility.

If you are anything like me, you won't have to look very far to find humbling things about yourself. I have a comprehensive ensemble of weaknesses, faults, character flaws and a prodigious list of sins committed over the years. If anything, an honest look at myself is more likely to make me puke than proud. If that were the end of the story, I'd be pretty miserable about myself and about life. But thankfully it is not the end of the story.

There is another side to each of us that we also need to be brutally honest about. There is the good side. Each and every one of us was made by God, and as the old saying goes, "*God doesn't make junk*". That means that underneath my corrupt and sinful nature, there is the seed of a heavenly being, an eternal spirit that is capable of seeing God. This beautiful creature lives inside even the most evil of sinners in this world, struggling constantly to break free and shine. Occasionally, I let mine out, and those are my best moments, moments of compassion, or unselfishness, or self-sacrificing honesty.

There is no pride in this beautiful creature within - how can I be proud about something I had nothing to do with? St Paul explains this logically;

*"For who makes you differ from another?  
And what do you have that you did not receive?  
Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"  
(1 Corinthians 4:7).*



Follow his argument, and you see how much sense it makes. If I am better than others in some way, then it is because of the gifts I was born with, gifts given to me by Another. So who deserves the praise for those gifts in me? Why should I pretend that I am the maker of the gifts and hog all the praise, when that is clearly not the case? In fact, there is a profound peace to be found in acknowledging this very basic truth. One of the Desert Fathers described his spiritual state thus:

*“When I have succeeded, I lay my past sins before my eyes and remind myself of how easily I fall without the help of God, and thus I avoid foolish pride. And when I have failed and feel down, I say to myself; Yet God still loves me, and His love lifts me up again from my fall.”*

This is the tightrope we walk every day of our lives: foolish pride to the one side, miserable despair to the other. But for those who manage to keep their balance, the feeling is exhilarating! Tightrope walkers use a long pole held horizontally in their hands to help them keep their balance. My pole has one word engraved on it in strong, gold letters ...

**“Truth.”**



**A Group of youth from St Abraam Church Spending the night at the monastery**



## QUESTION & ANSWER

### How do I Respond to Humiliation?

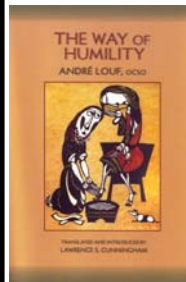
#### Abba Isaiah answers this question as follows:

If a person hurled a harsh word at you do not be disgusted or become haughty but hasten and make a metanaya. Do not blame him in your heart for in this way you will give rise to anger. If someone accused you of something you did not do, do not be distressed or get angry, but humble yourself and do a metanaya. Whether you did it or not say, "Forgive me. I will not do it again."

If some one insults you do not respond until he stops. Search in yourself the fear of God for you will find what you heard to be abiding in you and that it was caused by you. So, give him a metanaya as a man who knows the truth of the matter and that has sinned.

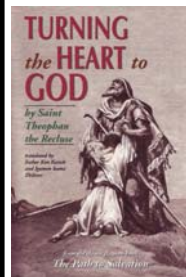
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## FURTHER READINGS



Andre Louf, "***The Way of Humility***" Cistercian Publications.

Andre Louf's probing essay on the nature of humility revisions this fundamental Christian virtue away from the misunderstandings of both the scholastic tradition and its modern counterparts to locate humility in the ancient sources of the monastic tradition. His incisive study prefaces a collection of primary texts from the early desert fathers. The translator has added further information about the author and his other writings as well as a bibliography for further reading.



Saint Theophan the recluse, "***Turning the Heart to God***" Conciliar Press.

This book is arguably the most profound work on repentance in all of Christendom. St. Theophan, a beloved Orthodox bishop from nineteenth century Russia, speaks not only from a deep knowledge of the Church Fathers, but also from a lifetime of experience in turning his heart to God and guiding others on this glorious Way that leads to our salvation. His writings are unique in that he combines centuries of Church wisdom with keen psychological insights for us today.