

### 7.6.2025 Trinity 3 (1 Peter 5:5-11)

In Book 3 of *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis has a chapter titled: *The Great Sin*. In this chapter, Lewis identifies the great sin, what he calls “the utmost evil,” as pride. He tells his reader that “Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison... Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind... it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.”

Is Lewis correct? Has pride “been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began,” or is this an exaggeration? We need to look no further than Scripture to put his words to the test. In fact, several Church Fathers, such as Augustine, Tertullian, and Gregory the Great referenced Scripture (Isaiah 14:12-15) when they identified pride as the beginning of all sin, pride as the root cause of Satan’s desire to exalt his throne “*above the stars of God*,” to be like the Most High, a self-centered, prideful desire that led to his “*fall from heaven*” (Luke 10:18).

“It was through Pride that the devil became the devil” (Lewis), and it was with pride that he tempted Eve in the Garden. After his own fall from grace, Satan approached Eve with the same sinful desire that took hold of him, the desire to be “*like God*” (Genesis 3:5), to exalt her self, and ultimately reject the authority of her Creator. Through the lies and schemes of the devil, and selfish pride, sin and death entered the world (Romans 5:12), and death is perhaps the most heartbreaking evidence that pride has indeed “been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.”

Pride is the great sin, the utmost evil, and therefore in the Epistle we read this morning, St. Peter exhorts Christians to boldly confront the temptation of pride with the virtue of humility. Peter tells us to “*be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time*” (1 Peter 5:5-6). Pride is the great sin, and humility is our greatest defense against this primary weapon of the enemy. Again, in the writings of the Church Fathers, humility is portrayed as no mere virtue, but a powerful weapon used to defend ourselves against pride, a way

to combat the devil and his schemes, and a means of true spiritual growth and intimacy with God.

When we think of defending ourselves against the attacks and snares of the devil, the first weapon of defense that comes to mind probably isn't humility. In our culture, people want to be viewed as a pride of roaring lions, not a flock of humble sheep, and even in the Church we'd much rather picture ourselves clad in the whole armor of God, taking up the sword of the Spirit, rather than being stripped of our former self that we may be clothed with humility. Nevertheless, the one virtue St. Peter speaks of in this spiritual battle is humility, and his words are not only inspired by God, the Divine Author of Holy Scripture, they also come from a place of his own personal, human experience.

St. Peter was a man, who like many of us, struggled with a type of pride that has trouble humbly accepting a gift of pure grace. Oswald Chambers described that type of pride in this way, he wrote, "The gospel of the grace of God awakens an intense longing in human souls and an equally intense resentment, because the truth that it reveals is not palatable or easy to swallow. There is a certain pride in people that causes them to give and give, but to come and accept a gift is another thing. I will give my life to martyrdom; I will dedicate my life to service, I will do anything. But do not humiliate me to the level of the most hell-deserving sinner and tell me that all I have to do is accept the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ."

To that point, the Gospels contain several examples of Peter showing how willing he was to "give and give" in service to our Lord. When Jesus called Peter, he immediately left everything behind to follow Him (Mark 1:18). On the raging sea, it was Peter who left the boat, and the other disciples, to meet Jesus on the water (Matthew 14:28-29). At the Transfiguration, it was Peter who suggested building three tabernacles to honor Moses, Elijah, and Jesus (Matthew 17:4), and when our Lord was betrayed and arrested, it was Peter who drew his sword to defend Him (John 18:10).

St. Peter would give and give, but to come and accept a gift was another thing. For example, on the night our Lord was betrayed, when Jesus knelt down with a towel and began to wash the disciples' feet, Peter's initial

response was, “*You shall never wash my feet!*” (John 13:8), and when Jesus spoke of His own death and resurrection, a sacrificial gift of pure grace, and a *command* that our Lord said “*I have received from My Father*” (John 10:17-18), Scripture tells us that Peter took Jesus aside and “*began to rebuke Him, saying, Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You! But Jesus turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me. For you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men*” (Matthew 16:22-23).

It's not necessarily a bad thing to give and give, but there is a certain pride that will prevent a person from humbly acknowledging our complete dependence on the “*gift of God*” (Romans 6:23), the infinite sacrifice He made to save us from sin and death, and there is a type of service motivated by pride that is a *stumbling block*, because pride doesn't have in mind “*the things of God, but the things of men.*” Peter began to (imagine this!) rebuke the Son of God, because his mind was set on things on the earth, the kingdoms of this world, the *things of men*. Peter was pridefully stepping out in front of Jesus, trying to direct our Lord's path forward by a human standard instead of a Divine. He was acting, as Jesus said, like Satan, like the Adversary, as one who opposed the very reason our Lord came, which was “*not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45).

Pride is a universal temptation with which we all struggle, but thanks be to God our Savior Christ has come with the remedy - humility. The humility of Christ is the example for all who call themselves Christians, and His perfect example is described in this passage St. Paul wrote to the Philippians, in which he exhorts Christians to “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness; And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross*” (Philippians 2:5-8).

We struggle to humble ourselves, yet Almighty God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, emptied Himself when He took on human flesh, and in an act of perfect humility infinitely beyond our comprehension gave His life on the

Cross at Calvary. Our Savior Christ has shown us the Way, if we will receive Him not only as our Savior, but in true humility, make Him the Lord of our life, every day surrendering our imperfect, human will to His perfect, Divine will for our lives, and for the world He died to save (1 Timothy 2:4).

St. Peter was a man who, like us, struggled against the “great sin,” the “utmost evil,” the “chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began,” and in the story of his continual fight against pride we find encouragement and hope for our own battle. To be *clothed with humility*, isn’t an easy endeavor, and Peter’s life, like ours, was marked with success and failure, but his death, as a martyr, and more specifically the way tradition tells us he chose to die, exemplified the virtue of humility. In records that date to the second century, it’s stated that St. Peter thought himself unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord, and therefore he requested to be crucified upside down. This final act of complete humility, the way he emptied himself on an upside down cross in Rome, is the example St. Peter sets for us all. By the grace of God, may we follow his example, and “*be subject one to another... be clothed with humility... Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time*” (1 Peter 5:6).