

## It's Not about You

Without breaking the seal of confession—in many confessions, I find an underlying cause that the penitent seems to miss. They confess they fight with their spouse because they know better than their spouse does. Teens confess they disobey their parents because their parents do not understand the world as they do. Children confess that they steal something just because they wanted it. Some people confess sins of sexual impurity, after all it does not hurt anyone. Yes, they are all sins but do you see the underlying theme?

They *think* and *feel* that they can do it. Yes, they *know* it is wrong, but they make the decision to commit it because literally, they can. If there is a sin that you keep confessing, it may be because even knowing it is wrong, it is something you *want* to do. AND you decide each time to do it. You choose to do it and then when guilt sets in you want to confess it. BUT, you may say you do not want to commit that sin again, you know you will because you will not try to stop. You like the sin, and the loving and merciful God will forgive you because after all, you have decided it is not a big thing. It has not broken your relationship with God.

The Old Testament Book of Proverbs is filled with practical wisdom. One of the most famous verses that is used so often is "Pride comes before the fall." Actually, this is based on the King James Version of verse 18 in Chapter 16. It has also been translated as "Pride goes before disaster, and a haughty spirit before a fall." People, who think of themselves as superior, will—in this life or the next—destroy themselves. It is difficult to keep being better than everyone else. A person with pride is one who is in arguments with everyone. As Proverbs points out "The stupid sow discord by their insolence. (13:10)". In 2 Timothy (3:2-5) are cautions to us concerning the last days by giving what those terrifying days will look like, but they also describe a prideful person: "People will be self-centered and lovers of money, proud, haughty, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, irreligious, callous, implacable, slanderous, licentious, brutal, hating what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, as they make a pretense of religion but deny its power." God may be honored, but God is not permitted to guide a person's life. They know better. This leads them away from God and into damnation. They think it is all about them. They are never really happy because if their world is themselves, no one can make them happy, even God.

A proud person does not need or want to share in the energies or grace of God. They feel they can live life so well that God will admit them into heaven because they were so good. They fail to realize and to accept the notion that all have fallen short in the sight of God (see Romans 3:23). James 4:6 reminds that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." God is not welcomed into the life of a proud person, and if the person is humble or open to God, they will receive grace. There is no reason for a person to be proud of themselves. Today's society

takes self-esteem in the wrong direction. It states that we should have confidence in our talents. But, we did not make ourselves good looking, talented or intelligent. We may have used these gifts of God to become persons of accomplishment, but it lies in God's gift of grace to us.

So it is not us, but it is God, who has blessed us the good looks, talents or intelligence. So our focus is not on us—but instead on God. This faithful acknowledgment is the beginning of humility. As the Psalmist writes (113), it is to God that glory be given. So a person can be proud of God and not of themselves. Humility is not the opposite of pride, but rather it is the absence of pride.

The example of humility is found in our Lord, as St Paul notes, in Philippians (2) that Jesus emptied Himself. The rule for all became obedient unto death. In our tradition, we call this *kenosis*, and because Jesus emptied Himself, He was able to complete fullness at the Resurrection. He was truly dead and became truly alive. Our Lord is the example of a person who humbled Himself so that He was exalted. We must follow His model and empty ourselves of those aspects of life in which we are self-centered and self-absorbed or think that when we sin we can justify ourselves before God because we know what is best. Humility is standing before God as we indeed are, as we were created. We are creation. We are not the creator.

Humility is accepting what we are. We do not put ourselves down because that would be demeaning the creation of God. We are beautiful. We are talented. We are intelligent. We are these and more because that is what God made us to be. We are not some lowly creation, but preferably, we are God's work of art. We see ourselves as God sees us, His beautiful and wonderful act of creation, His children. We belong to the artist who created us. When we look at every other creation, we see them also as beautiful, talented and intelligent as expressions of the image of God. We are not greater than they. We are just different. We see what is in them that is greater than what is in us and we celebrate God's handiwork. We do not judge or criticize but instead, we always consider them more significant than ourselves because to us we see the presence of God who we love with our whole being. We are overwhelmed by their presence because they show us God.

As in every journey in faith, the beginning point and the ending point is in Christ. As St Cyril of Alexandria taught: "If the poison of pride is swelling up in you, turn to the Eucharist; and that Bread, which is your God humbling and disguising Himself, will teach you humility." Start with the Eucharist. If God can come to us in the form of bread and wine as His Body and Blood, which we consume, how can we not be humbled to become lowly for others? Then in our day to day life, we do not take the first place but step back and let others and their needs come before ours. As Jesus did. Would not we allow a person to be in first if they were attempting to reach a dying parent? So that is the assumption we make when two lanes of traffic are

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merging. We do not have to push ahead but that person who is trying to cut us off to be first may be the person rushing to a dying parent. Let them go. Yet, they are taking what belongs to us. But we remember it really belongs to God and God may want them to have it.

What we do in action we must also do in words. Are we like the proud Pharisee who thanked God that he was not like the publican? We should acknowledge our imperfections and bless others who have them too. Once a scheduler made a mistake that impacted upon me. She was all apologetic. I calmly remarked that since I am not perfect, I don't expect anyone to be. She was so profuse in her thanks that I thought here is a woman who is trying her best and things happen. She was taking the

harsh treatment from others and accepting the blame because she hit "all" as opposed to "individual." Yes, it was her mistake, but I do not think there is a person who uses a computer that does not hit the wrong key sometimes. So I presume that she was surprised that it did not bother me that I was inconvenienced by her mistake. I just told her I make mistakes as well. We should treat everyone all year round like we do at Forgiveness Vespers.

Humility is remembering our relationship with God. Compared to God we are like cockroaches. We should not forget our place and be grateful for all the blessings we unworthy lowly creatures received.

*Fr Jonathan Morse*

## Jesus, Our Precious Easter Gift

**W**e have completed the Great Fast which called us to renewal, transformation, and conversion of heart. We refocused our relationship with God. We witnessed how Jesus Christ, in biblical terms, "gave Himself...emptied Himself for us. He lived simply. He walked on our earth freely, and was disencumbered from all earthly possessions. Jesus let go even of His privilege and title, "Although He was at one with God, Jesus did not think He should retain equality with God" (Song of Jesus Christ).

Yesterday, I was crucified with Christ; today I am glorified with Him. We are asked to become like Jesus Christ, since Christ becomes like us. We are asked to become Gods because of Him, since he

became man for us. He became poor, that through His poverty, we may become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). He took upon Himself the form of a servant (Phil 2:7) that we be delivered from slavery. He came down so we might rise up. He was despised so that we might be given honor. He died so as to save us from death. He ascended to heaven that we, who are prone to sin, may be lifted up to Him (Gregory Nazianzus, *Homily on the Holy Pasch*).

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a past event. It is a dynamic mystery that plays out in the holy chaos of our earthly lives. Life is death and resurrection, in all of its unpredictability. Eucharist and betrayals are not antonyms. We are daily called to follow in the foot-

steps of Jesus who assured everyone that there is a place at His table for us all. Like Jesus, we are called to reach out to everyone, especially the outcast, the marginalized, and disenfranchised in our midst.

I spoke with an 80-year-old chemist friend recently at a meeting. He said his passion was in education and that whenever he learns something new, he immediately wishes to share it. He added, "I'll stop sharing when I stop learning and living." May we never stop living and sharing Jesus' Resurrection message, our precious Easter Gift with great passion for Jesus Christ is Risen, Truly He Is Risen! The Eucharistic Jesus is in our Church and should be treasured in our heart as we receive Him frequently in Holy Communion.

*Sr Jonathan*

## Hagia Sophia in Istanbul Speaks Ukrainian

The history of the Museum of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, the Turkish capital, can now be heard in the Ukrainian language. This is reported on Ukraine's Consulate General's Facebook page.

Together with the embassy and the volunteers of Guide.ua, they created a translation of audio tours of Hagia Sophia, and now the museum's management included it on the list of languages for sound audio tours in Hagia Sophia. This was reported by Channel 24.

Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya Müzesi) in Istanbul speaks Ukrainian. Consul General of Ukraine in Istanbul Alexander Hamann and employees of the Consulate General have confirmed this.

They have noted that work on the creation of the Ukrainian

audio guide began more than six months ago. The Consulate General expresses gratitude to Turkish colleagues and volunteers who supported this idea and helped make Istanbul even more interesting for Ukrainian-speaking tourists.

"We promise not to stop on this. We are working to ensure that the Ukrainian language in Turkey and, in particular, in the tourist Istanbul, was more there," added the General Consulate.

Earlier, diplomats in Turkey succeeded in getting rid of the mentioning that Roksolana was of Russian descent. Currently, tourists see that the famous sultan's wife and philanthropist was born in the Ukrainian city of Rohatyn in Ivano-Frankivsk region.

