

# The Spiritual Power of Humility

## 2022 UOL LENTEN RETREAT

Saturday, March 26, 2022  
SS. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church  
1025 N. Belle Vista  
Youngstown, Pennsylvania



Ukrainian Orthodox League of the USA  
*Dedicated to our Church . . . Devoted to its Youth*

## Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth,  
despair, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience,  
and love to Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and  
not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou, unto ages of ages.

Amen.



# The Virtue of Humility

In the Orthodox tradition, humility has often been called the “mother of all virtues,” and pride has been named “the cause of all sin.” The wise and honest person is the one who is humble.

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*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

*It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor, than  
to divide the spoils with the proud.*

*A man’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will retain honor  
(Prov 16.18, 16.19, 29.23).*

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According to the Gospel, in the Song of the Virgin, the Lord scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts and exalts those who are humble and meek (cf. Lk 1.51–52). This is the exact teaching of Jesus.

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*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be  
exalted*

*(Lk 14.11, 18.14, Prov 3.34).*

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Humility does not mean degradation or remorse. It does not mean effecting some sort of demeaning external behavior. It does not mean considering oneself as the most vile and loathsome of creatures. Christ Himself was humble and He did not do this. God Himself, according to the spiritual tradition of the Church, has perfect humility, and He certainly does not act in this way.

Genuine humility means to see reality as it actually is in God. It means to know oneself and others as known by God—a power, according to Saint Isaac, greater than that of raising the dead! The humble lay aside all vanity and conceit in the service of the least of God’s creatures, and to consider no good act as beneath one’s dignity and honor. Humility is to know oneself, without the grace of God, as dust, sinful and dead.

God is humble because He cares about the least: the birds in the air, the grass in the fields, the worst of sinners (cf. Mt 6.25–30). Christ is humble because He associates with the lowly, becoming the slave of all in taking on Himself the sins of the world.

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*If I then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you*  
(Jn 13.14–15).

*You know that the rulers of the pagans lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*  
(Mt 20.25–28).

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All Christians are to follow the example of Christ in His divine humility. Saint Paul teaches:

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*Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*  
(Phil 2.3–11).

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The exaltation of Jesus as a man depended entirely on His self-emptying humility. True greatness, divine greatness, is the ability to be the least and to the least with the absolute certitude that it is externally and divinely important, that it is an imitation of God Himself. True humility for the sinful man is to know that indeed, according to one's own possibilities and gifts, each one is truly the first and greatest of sinners (cf. 1 Tim 1.15), for each one has sinned in his own way "like no other man" (Saint Andrew of Crete, 7th c., *Penitential Canon*). The truly humble person is the one who, confessing his sins, is "faithful over little," and doing so, is exalted by the Lord and is "set over much." Only such a person will "enter into the joy of his Master" (Mt 25.14–23, Lk 19.17). *Thomas Hopko, The Orthodox Church*

## PRIDE GOES BEFORE A FALL OR EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER

### DISCUSSION ONE: PARTS 1 AND 2

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This discussion/exercise has two parts. In Part 1 you'll have an opportunity to list behaviors that describe and contrast "humillity" and "a lack of humility," and in Part 2 tell a story about how "a lack of humility" went before a fall or when "humility" saved you from destruction or led to a positive outcome.

#### PART 1 – PRIDE GOES BEFORE A FALL

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##### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Have someone read aloud the two paragraphs below.
2. Then, brainstorm a list of behaviors that demonstrate how "a lack of humility" and a list of behaviors that demonstrate "humility."
3. You have about 20 minutes to complete this task.
4. Finally, open the envelop and give members of your group the list of more examples and compare it with your brainstormed list.
5. ASK what insights to have during this exercise?

##### READ

Throughout our worship during the church year, in scripture, sermons, hymnography and prayers we read and hear a lot about about humility and it's opposite behaviors, especially during Great Lent. During Great particular attention is placed on readings from the Old Testament Readings. Proverbs, of course, is one of the Old Testament books. Proverbs discusses questions of values, moral behavior, the meaning of human life, and appropriate conduct. It's a book of Wisdom.

We are all too familiar with humility's opposites described in Proverbs, as well. They are not limited to "pride" alone, but also behavior such as, vanity, superiority, arrogance, disdain, presumption, conceit, pomposity, pretentiousness, snobbishness, haughtiness—to name just a few—and their destructive consequences.

##### BRAINSTORM THE FOLLOWING

<b>BEHAVIOR DEMONSTRATING LACK OF HUMILITY</b>	<b>BEHAVIOR DEMONSTRATING HUMILITY</b>
<i>(Here's an example: Focuses on others' failures.)</i>	<i>(Here's an example: Realizes how far they fall short and have an overwhelming sense of their need to grow.)</i>

## PART 1: MY STORY

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### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Read the following instructions aloud.
2. Reflect for a moment and think about a situation where “a lack of humility” got in the way and the outcome was not quite what you expected. If you ran in to a similar situation again, how would you handle it differently based on your experience.
3. Or, if you would rather, reflect for a moment and then tell us about a time when you “swallowed your pride” and were surprised by a constructive outcome and positive outcome. How did that experience change you?
4. Discuss insights you’ve had from hearing the stories of others.

**Expressions that might help you think of a story:** “Pride goes before a fall,” “A Stitch in time saves nine,” “I wish I had listened to my mother.” “The reach that exceeded my grasp.” “A penny wise and a pound foolish.” “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

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*MY NOTES*

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## A Few Words to the Wise from Proverbs



“The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.”  
Proverbs 22:4

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.”  
Proverbs 11:2

“Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured,  
he will not go unpunished.”  
Proverbs 16:5

“One’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.”  
Proverbs 29:23

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Pride will destroy you.”  
Proverbs 16:18

“It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.”  
Proverbs 16:19

“Scoffers set a city aflame, but the wise turn away wrath.”  
Proverbs 29:8

“Better to be lowly and have a servant than to play the great man and lack bread.”  
Proverbs 12:9

Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.  
Proverbs 3:34



# Wisdom, from the Fathers and Saints



Meekness and humility of heart are virtues without which it is impossible to inherit the Heavenly Kingdom, to be happy on earth, or to experience inner calm.

-- *Counsels of Venerable St. Antony (Putilov) of Optina*

Our humility is our surest intercessor before the face of the Lord. It is by dint [means] of humility and penance that the last shall be first.

-- *St. Macarius of Optina*

Know that when you do not possess calm, you do not have humility within you. The Lord revealed this in the following words, which indicate as well where to seek after calm. He said: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:29).

-- *Advice from the Holy Elder St. Leo (Nagolkin) of Optina*

"The humbler our opinion of ourselves, the more swiftly our prayer rises to God. So soon as we lose humility, each and every ascetic effort is nullified. If pride is active in us, or fault-finding, or unfriendliness, the Lord stands remote from us."

-- *Archimandrite Sophrony (His Life is Mine: Part 2, Chapter 3; SVS Press pg. 123):*

"Humble-mindedness will bring all the virtues."

-- *St. Anthimos of Chios +1960*

If, according to the example of Abraham and Job, we think that we are earth and ashes, then we shall never be robbed, but we will always have something to give to others: not gold and silver, but an example of humility, patience, and love toward God. May there be glory to Him forever. Amen.

-- *Saints Barsanuphius & John, Guidance Toward Spiritual Life*

Extirpate two thoughts within thyself: do not consider yourself worthy of anything great, and do not think that any other man is much lower than you in worthiness. Learn humility beforehand, which the Lord commanded in word and showed forth in deed. Hence, do not expect obedience from others, but be ready for obedience yourself.

-- *Saint Basil the Great.*

Has someone offended you? Guard your breast with the sign of the Cross; remember what took place on the Cross, and all will be extinguished. Think not of offenses only, but recall also whatever good you have received from the one who has offended you, and at once you shall grow meek. Bring to mind the fear of God, and quickly you shall grow more temperate and calm. Train yourself not to offend another during offenses themselves, and then, when offended, you will not feel grief. Think to yourself that he who is offending you is in a frenzy and not in his right mind, and then you will not be vexed at the offense.

-- *Saint John Chrysostom.*

He, who grieves sorely in his heart when dishonored or offended by others, ought to know from this that he bears within himself the ancient serpent. If he will bear the offense in silence, or will answer the one offending him with deep humility, then he has thereby weakened and crushed this serpent.

-- *Venerable Simeon the New Theologian.*

Even if your soul should suffer somewhat from an offense, keep the sorrow within yourself. For it is said: "Within me my heart is troubled" (Psalm 142:4), that is, the passion has not come out, but has been humbled like a wave that has broken up on the shore. Calm your raging heart. Let your passions be ashamed at the presence of reason in you, as playful children are ashamed before a man commanding respect.  
-- *Saint Basil the Great.*

What made our Lord Jesus Christ lay aside his garments, gird himself with a towel, and, pouring water into a basin, begin to wash the feet of those who were below Him (John 13:4, etc.), if not to teach us humility? For it was humility He showed us by example of what He then did. And indeed those who want to be accepted into the foremost rank cannot achieve this otherwise than through humility; for in the beginning the thing that caused downfall from heaven was a movement of pride. So, if a man lacks extreme humility, if he is not humble with all his heart, all his mind, all his spirit, all his soul and body - he will not inherit the kingdom of God.

-- *St Anthony the Great, "Early Fathers From the Philokalia," by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 45-46*

Do not become a disciple of one who praises himself, in case you learn pride instead of Humility.

-- *St. Mark the Ascetic*

God descends to the humble as waters flow down from the hills into the valleys.

-- *St. John of Kronstadt*

I saw all the snares that the enemy spreads over the whole world and I said, groaning, "What can get through such snares?" Then I heard a voice saying to me, "Humility."

-- *St. Anthony the Great*

Pray simply. Do not expect to find in your heart any remarkable gift of prayer. Consider yourself unworthy of it. Then you will find peace. Use the empty cold dryness of your prayer as food for your humility. Repeat constantly: I am not worthy; Lord, I am not worthy! But say it calmly, without agitation.

-- *St. Macarius of Optina*

The heights of humility are great and so are the depths of boasting; I advise you to attend to the first and not to fall into the second.

-- *Abba Isidore of Pelusia*

When anyone out of kindness praises you to others, and they pass on these praises to you, do not consider them as a just tribute of esteem really due you, but ascribe them solely to the kindness of heart of the person who spoke of you in this way, and pray for him that God may strengthen him in his kindness of heart and in every virtue; but acknowledge yourself to be the greatest of sinners, not just out of humility, but truthfully, actually, knowing as you do your evil deeds.

-- *St. John of Kronstadt*

When pride retreats from a man, humility begins to dwell in him, and the more pride is diminished, so much more does humility grow. The one gives way to the other as to its opposite. Darkness departs and light appears. Pride is darkness, but humility is light.

-- *St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, Journey to Heaven.*

The one who has come to understand the weakness of human nature has had experience of the divine power, and such a person who because of it has succeeded in some things and is eager to succeed in others never looks down on anyone. For he knows that in the same way that God has helped him and freed him from many passions and hardships, so can He help everyone when He wishes,

especially those who are striving for His sake. Although for His own reasons He does not deliver all from their passions right away, still as a good and loving physician He heals in His own good time each one of those who are striving.

-- *St. Maximus the Confessor, Four Centuries on Love*

It is useless to accuse those around us and those who live with us of somehow interfering with or being an impediment to our salvation and spiritual perfection... Spiritual or emotional dissatisfaction comes from within ourselves, from inexperience and from poorly conceived opinions we do not want to abandon, but which bring on doubt, embarrassment, and misunderstanding. All of this tires and burdens us, and brings us to a sorry state. We would do well to comprehend the Holy Fathers' simple advice: If we will humble ourselves, we will find tranquility anywhere, without having to mentally wander about many other places, where we might have the same, or even worse, experiences.

-- *Counsels of the Venerable Elder St. Amvrossy of Optina*

One day Abba Arsenius consulted an old Egyptian monk about his own thoughts. Someone noticed this and said to him, "Abba Arsenius, how is it that you with such a good Latin and Greek education, ask this peasant about your thoughts?" He replied, "I have indeed been taught Greek and Latin, but I do not know even the alphabet of this peasant."

-- *The Desert Fathers*

