

Day Eleven: “*Just Plain Human Respect*”

1. Place yourself in God's presence

2. Ask Him for the grace you seek: to be emptied of your attachment to human respect and to be filled with fear of the Lord

3. Today's Meditation:

Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets (Lk 6:26).

Why is there a need to be emptied of *human respect*? Isn't respect something that everyone deserves because of their human dignity?

The answer to the latter is simple: yes. The answer to the former is not so simple. This is why we need to meditate on its truth.

Human respect, understood as the honor each man deserves because of his human dignity, is not a bad thing, but a good one. Sharing the same Creator, sharing in the same nature, and called to share in the same eternal happiness merits sharing respect for our fellow brothers and sisters. However, human respect, understood as being more concerned with what other people think about me than what God thinks of me, is not a good thing. It's actually sinful; and because it is sinful we should empty ourselves of it.

Emptying ourselves of human respect is hard, because it often goes unnoticed. St. John Bosco did not realize how harmful it was for the boys of his oratory until he had this dream:

[The man] led me to a vast, boundless plain, veritably a lifeless desert, with not a soul in sight or a tree or brook. Yellowed, dried-up vegetation added to the desolation I had no idea where I was or what was I to do. For a moment I even lost sight of my guide and feared that I was lost, utterly alone. Father Rua, Father Francesca, nowhere to be seen. When I finally saw my friend coming toward me, I sighed in relief.

He led the way and I followed in silence, but after a long, dismal trudge, I began worrying whether I would ever be able to cross that vast expanse, what with my toothache and swollen legs. Suddenly I saw a road ahead.

We took the road. It was beautiful, wide, and neatly paved. Both sides were lined with magnificent verdant hedges dotted with gorgeous flowers. Roses, especially, peeped everywhere through the leaves. At first glance, the road was level and comfortable, and so I ventured upon it without the least suspicion, but soon I noticed that it insensibly kept sloping downward. Though it did not look steep at all, I found myself moving so swiftly that I felt I was effortlessly gliding through the air. Really, I was gliding and hardly using my feet. Then the thought struck me that the return trip would be very long and arduous.

"How shall we get back to the Oratory?" I asked worriedly.

"Do not worry," he answered. "The Almighty wants you to go. He who leads you on will also know how to lead you back."

The road is sloping downward. As we were continuing on our way, flanked by banks of roses and other flowers, I became aware that the Oratory boys and very many others whom I did not know were following me. Somehow I found myself in their midst. As I was looking at them, I noticed now one, now another fall to the ground and instantly be dragged by an unseen force toward a frightful drop, distantly visible, which sloped into a furnace. "What makes these boys fall?" I asked my companion.

"Take a closer look," he replied.

I did. Traps were everywhere, some close to the ground, others at eye level, but all well concealed. Unaware of their danger, many boys got caught, and they tripped, they would sprawl to the ground, legs in the air. Then, when they managed to get back on their feet, they would run headlong down the road toward the abyss. Some got trapped by the head, others by the neck, hand, arms, legs, or sides, and were pulled down instantly. The ground traps, fine as spiders' webs and hardly visible, seemed very flimsy and harmless; yet, to my surprise, every boy they snared fell to the ground.

Noticing my astonishment, the guide remarked, "Do you know what this is?"

"Just some filmy fiber," I answered.

"A mere nothing," he said, "just plain human respect."

Just plain human respect often keeps us from the path of freedom and holiness. Fear of what others will think or say about us is often the greatest deterrent from our accomplishing the good that we know we are called to do.

If we want to walk the path of freedom in complete service to Jesus Christ through Mary, then we must rid ourselves of such fear. We must learn to give up our desire to "fit-in". Remember the words of Our Lord:

If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you (Jn 15:18-19).

Questions to guide your meditation: Do I ever find myself desperate for attention, respect, acceptance, and approval from other human beings? Do I worry about how people are going to accept what I say? What I do? Or how I live? How often to act based on "human respect" (out of fear of what others will think or say or judge)? Do I have a healthy fear of the Lord? Am I concerned more about doing the Lord's will or pleasing others? What needs to be done to correct any of the ways I find myself falling into the sin of human respect from the questions above?

- Today's Prayer -
Jesus living in Mary,

*teach me to be generous,
to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to look for any reward,
save that of knowing that I do your holy will.*