

Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:1-2

### Chapter 7 On Humility

**Brothers, the Holy Scripture cries out to us, saying: ‘Whoever is self-promoting will be humbled, and whoever is humble will be promoted. When it says this, it shows us that all self-promotion is a kind of pride.**

This is Benedict’s longest chapter, and he has much to say about humility. Scripture cries out, and here Benedict seems to make no distinction between the Holy Scripture and God. The passage comes from Luke, but is more like Wisdom literature, saying that those who vaunt themselves will be brought low, while those who regard themselves as of no importance, will be raised up. Benedict simply says, that those who vaunt themselves display a form of pride, which is the mother of all vices. This is the only time that Benedict uses the word pride. Dear Lord and God, in our psychological world and culture of individualism, the question of pride and self-promotion has become more complicated. However, we seem to know instinctively those who vaunt themselves, and it seems to lead to all manner of difficulties. Keep me humble and make me true to myself, recognising the good you do through me, accepting that it is your good and your grace. Meanwhile help me acknowledge the wrongs I have done and take responsibility for them.

Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:3-4

**The Prophet shows that he avoids this when he says: ‘Lord, my heart is not lifted up, nor are my eyes fixed on the heights. I have not mixed myself in great affairs nor in things too wonderful for me. But what if my thoughts are not humble? What if I rise up in pride? Then you will refuse me like a mother does a weaned child.’**

We need to take the words that Benedict has written, and not get caught up in questions of translation and the Biblical sources he used. Benedict uses Scripture again to cry out to us with warnings about pride. The example of the Prophet is, that he does not let his heart become proud, he does not fix his sights on positions of power and influence, nor get caught up in matters where position is important, or which are beyond him. But if he does let all these things happen, he risks the rejection of God, just as a mother pushes away a weaned child from her breast. Dear Lord and God, we know that you never reject us out of malice, but continue to draw us to yourself. However, you desire that we mature and develop a true relationship with you. It is the immature who seek power and influence, whose eyes are haughty. Keep me from desiring those things. Keep me humble in your sight and help me grow in relationship to you and in your love.

Friday 11<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:5-6

**So, brothers, if we wish to arrive at the pinnacle of humility and if we wish to attain speedily to the heavenly height to which one climbs by humility in this present life, then by our ascending acts we must set up that ladder which appeared to Jacob in a dream. It showed him angels descending and ascending.**

There seems something anomalous about the ‘pinnacle’ of humility, but this is deliberate. Clearly Benedict sees humble actions and good actions done with humility, to be the means by which we are raised to the heights of heaven. It is by these actions that a ladder is set up, representing our journey in life, since the ladder was seen as a motif, in the same way that we consider the journey. Benedict likens it to the ladder seen by Jacob in his dream, on which angels are seen ascending and descending. Dear Lord and God, we have lost touch with such motifs, and yet we have our own, which consists more of a journey with its twists and turns.

Our goal remains the same and consists in being united with you. But if we are to see you face to face, being united with your Son and Spirit, we must act according to your will and through your Spirit and imitate your Son. Help me follow that way, with you as my guide.

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:7

**Doubtless, we should understand this descent and ascent as follows: one descends by pride and ascends by humility.**

Jacob's ladder was not interpreted correctly in Benedict's day, although it was often used in monastic literature. However, it does not invalidate the idea of a ladder, reaching to heaven and representing a pathway. Descent is effected by adopting an attitude of pride, even in the exercise of good deeds. This means that we attribute the good to ourselves, to our own effort and publish the fact. On the other hand, we are raised on the ladder, through the good deeds we perform, without thought for ourselves, but only for the good of the other. We attribute this good to God alone and have offered our own limbs and minds and bodies to his service. This is humility. Dear Lord and God, it is almost as if we do not think too hard of what we are doing, but we respond with generosity of spirit, which is your Spirit within. Help me to make that way of humility an internal attitude which happens automatically, because I am in touch with your Spirit and your Will.

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:8-9

**The towering ladder is, of course, our earthly life. When the heart is humble, God raises it up to heaven. We could say that our body and soul are the sides of this ladder, into which the divine summons has inserted various rungs of humility and discipline for the ascent.**

Benedict tries to relate the person and life of the disciple with his image of the ladder. What seems clear is that our whole being makes up the sides of the ladder, which is raised up by God, provided we have a humble heart. . The humble heart is discerned if the sides of the ladder, our body and soul, are joined by rungs of discipline and aspects of humility. Hence we do not actually climb the ladder, but are raised up more mature and whole as the rungs become evident, and as we respond to the divine summons. Dear Lord and God, it is perhaps not an image we would use today, but certain elements are clear. As we respond humbly to your summons and practice the aspects of humility and discipline which your command demands, our whole being is drawn up into your presence. Help me listen for your commands and respond to them with the humility you desire of us.

Monday 14<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:10-11

**Thus the first step of humility is to utterly flee forgetfulness by keeping the fear of God always before one's eyes. We must constantly recall the commandments of God, continually mulling over how hell burns sinners who despise God, and eternal life is prepared for those who fear God.**

The very first aspect of humility is basically the practice of the presence of God. Benedict puts it in the traditional way, namely to keep the fear of God at the forefront of awareness. And it is forgetfulness that we must shun. For Benedict, this consists in keeping the goals in mind, namely eternal life, on the one hand, and hell on the other hand. Today we might concentrate on that prayerful relationship with the Father, who is always present, but whom we tend to forget. Dear Lord and God, this awareness and remembrance of you throughout

the day, is something which I need to cultivate, so that it becomes a true part of my whole being. Help me build this into my every action, my every word and my whole disposition.

Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:12-13

**We should guard ourselves at all times from sins and vices, that is of thoughts, tongue, hands, feet or self-will, but also desires of the flesh. Let each one take into account that he is constantly observed by God from heaven and our deeds everywhere lie open to the divine gaze and are reported by the angels at every hour.**

Benedict urges us to be self-aware of self-promotion, of ego advancement in all areas of our thoughts and actions, especially self-will and self-indulgence. We see here the contrast between the true Self and our ego. Verse 13 could be construed as a belief in God as a policeman in the sky, which the mature Christian needs to banish as a false god. Underlying this verse is the urge for us to remember God's presence always, which is the main thrust of this aspect of humility. Dear Lord and God, it is at moments when we are most self-indulgent that we forget you and turn away from your commands. Help me to practice awareness of your presence, so that I am always with you and want to share your life and your love in every situation.

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:14-16

**The Prophet demonstrates to us when he shows that God is always privy to our thoughts: *God examines hearts and minds. Likewise, The Lord knows human thoughts. And again, You have known my thoughts from afar.***

Benedict, using the scriptures, demonstrates the intimacy we share with God, and in particular with regards our thoughts. Thoughts are important in the monastic world, for it is these that we manifest to our spiritual father to help us discern our direction in the spiritual life. They are also the prelude to action, and hence is important to know our thoughts and where they might be leading us. Hence, on several counts, the monk needs to be aware of his thoughts, and know, in the first place, that he shares them in the intimacy of his relationship with God. Dear Lord and God, know my thoughts and prompt me to keep them focused upon you and upon your will. Help me banish all thoughts which threaten purity of heart, that I may know only your thoughts and make them the basis of my action.

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:17-18

**Human thoughts will be made plain to you. So, then, to be careful about his bad thoughts, the faithful brother should say in his heart: *I will be blameless before him if I restrain myself from my evil.***

Our thoughts are not hidden from God, even if we hide them from each other, or pretend to hide them from ourselves. Thus it is important to say in our heart – I will be blameless in your sight, I will actually restrain myself from evil. Positive thoughts are made plain to the Lord, and he will make us blameless in his sight. Dear Lord and God, it is so easy to get caught in a circle of negative thoughts, since they multiply and pile up one upon the other. Help me find something positive to say about everyone, so that in time all negativity is blown away, and with it all judgement of others.

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> August RB 7: 19-20

**As for self-will, we are forbidden to carry it out, for Scripture says of us: *Beware of your own desires.* And so we ask God in prayer that his will is accomplished in us.**

The self-will considered here, is not simply the pursuit of pleasures, including those of the flesh, but are rather the plans and schemes that we pursue, contrary to the will of any authority, including God. It is the form of self-will which declares that I am my own master, indeed I am god. The counterbalance to this is obedience, and especially obedience to God, which begins with the Lord's prayer, which asks that God's will be done – on earth, in us, as well as in heaven. Dear Lord and God, help me see what things I pursue, which are no your will. Help me realise that when I do not listen to your word, I am in danger of going in another direction. Keep me true and focused on your will for us, and in particular for me.

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:21-22

**Thus it is with good reason that we learn to steer clear of our will, for we dread the warning of Holy Scripture: *There are paths that seem straight to us, but ultimately they plunge into the depths of hell.* We also find frightening what is said to the careless: *They are decadent and have become abominable by following their own desires.***

Benedict keeps emphasising the warnings of Scripture, which indicate the warnings of God to the errant brother. However, it is not hear that we wish to fall into once again, but rather to experience the delights of virtue and of being in God's presence, even now as well as in the future. It is really Benedict wishing to awaken our deep desires to be one with God, rather than our superficial desires which lead us and keep us from God. Dear Lord and God, help me experience the delight of virtue, of being with you, even in the limited way I can manage at the moment, and keep me away from the path of indulgence and satisfaction of my own ego-self.

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:23-25

**We should be convinced that our lower inclinations are well known to God, for the Prophet says to God: *All my desire is before you.* Thus it is imperative that we beware of evil desire, for death lurks near the gateway of pleasure. That is why Scripture commands: *Do not pursue your lusts.***

We may be convinced in theory that God knows all our desires, but if this conviction remains in our heads, we have little reason to heed it. If on the other hand, it is a conviction that God loves us and wants only our good, then there is more chance that we will heed that love and turn away from lesser desires, and particularly those which are mere fleeting pleasures. We almost always heed the call of love in our hearts, hence we need to cultivate this real relationship with God, and not merely fear the consequences of our actions and the path on which they are likely to convey us. Dear Lord and God, keep me mindful of you and in particular your steadfast love. Who else can love me as you do? And do I consider myself loveable? It is this intimacy we must build, so that I am always turned towards you.

Monday 21<sup>st</sup> August RB 7:26-27

**Therefore, if the eyes of the Lord survey the good and the bad, and the Lord constantly looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is anyone with the wisdom to seek God.**

Benedict seems to feel the need to quote further passages, emphasising the Lord's watchfulness over us. In the end, it is surely to encourage our own watchfulness over ourselves, or it runs the danger of our relationship with God becoming distorted in the way

that it often seemed in the past. We project the blame for our evil actions on the lack of watchfulness by God, or else we fear that watchfulness, to keep us from doing evil. Both these attitudes lead to distortion and immaturity. Dear Lord and God, your awareness of our every thought and word is a sign of your concern for your creatures, for you know our propensity to wander and drift from the true way which leads to good. Nudge me back on track, stand in my way if I change direction, but teach me more and more to love and know your will.

Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> August RB 7:28-29

**And if the angels assigned to us report our deeds to the Lord daily, even day and night, then brothers we must continually make sure, as the psalmist says, that God never sees us falling into evil and becoming useless people.**

Why would we become 'useless' people if we fall into evil ways? Benedict sees each of us giving glory to God when we conform our will to his. If we go our own way and indulge our self-will, and thereby fall into evil ways, we do not give glory to the one who made us and redeemed us in Christ. This does not imply that God abandons us, but in our present drifting state, we are useless to him. We cannot manifest his glory, nor be an example for others. Dear Lord and God, this is part of shunning forgetfulness, that we never forget that we are here to give glory to our Creator. Help me realise how important a task it is, to point through my very being, to the God who Creates the Universe. May I be a light to his glory.

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> August RB 7:30

**Because he is merciful, he may spare us now and hope we change for the better, but eventually he will say, *You did these things and I was silent.***

God is both merciful and patient. He does not force his way upon us. He waits for us to be drawn and for our hearts to be touched and penetrated. Yet, Benedict makes it clear that there comes a moment when we need to respond. It sounds as if this response is called forth by God speaking to us, and letting us know that he knows, yet was silent. One is reminded of Adam in the garden, who has tried to hide, but in vain. And thus we are reminded again to shun forgetfulness and to be aware, always, of God's presence. Dear Lord and God, many of us struggle with the idea that you are watchful in order to punish our transgressions. These are childhood fears which stem from a culture of fear, both in society and in the church. Free me from that culture and make me realise your constant love, your mercy and your patience with me, and help me respond with true repentance.

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:31-33

**The second step of humility is not to delight in satisfying our desires out of love for our own way. Rather, we should pattern our behaviour on that saying of the Lord: *I have not come to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.* Scripture also says: *Self-will brings punishment (on itself) but obedience to duty merits a reward.***

Having acknowledged God's presence and shunned all forgetfulness, we now commit ourselves to listening to him and acting on his words by obedience to his will. In this we show that we no longer delight in fulfilling our own desires, which inevitably bring disaster, but we desire to be like Christ and reap the rewards of following his way. Dear Lord and God, confirm me in the awareness of your presence, and teach me to attend to your words always. Make it part of my deep desire to follow Christ in his obedience to you, his Father, and help me too, to be a true son.

Friday 25<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:34

**The third step of humility is to submit to the superior in all obedience for love of God. In this, we imitate the Lord, of whom the Apostle says: *He became obedient to the point of death.***

In Benedict's monastery, the word of God is mediated through the Abbot or Superior. Hence obedience to the Superior is obedience to God. But should this become a problem because of particular personalities, Benedict adds that we do this 'for love of God'. We imitate the Lord 'to the point of death', and this could have several meanings. Firstly the point of death may be the death of the ego-self, which can so exercise self-will. Secondly, we submit to the Superior in the monastery until death, in other words for the rest of our life. We may, of course imitate the Lord in taking up our cross and giving of ourselves completely, as he did, for others. Dear Lord and God, there are a number of ways that we are obedient to our brethren, to the point of death. Help me to sacrifice myself for all, and live in complete obedience to you, out of love.

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:35-37

**The fourth step of humility is this: when obedience involves harsh, hostile things, or even injustice of some sort, one embraces them patiently with no outcry. Let us bear such things without flagging or fleeing, as Scripture says: *Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved. Likewise, Let your heart be strengthened and endure the trials of the Lord.***

We have moved from listening to God himself, to obedience to the Superior, and now to obedience even when the command is harsh, burdensome or even unjust. Benedict sees these as progressive steps in deeper humility. This fourth step certainly challenges both our faith in God and our natural desire to protect ourselves and our dignity. Benedict is not wanting us to be scrubbed out or treated harshly, but when we are – and it does happen – we are to persevere to the end, and endure the trials of the Lord. We are to act like our Saviour who endured the cross, and was raised by God, not by an insistence on his dignity and rights. Dear Lord and God, this is a very hard step, and goes against our instincts for ourselves and for others. There is a hint that it is none-the-less you, who have brought this situation about, just as you brought Jesus to the cross, so that you could be glorified in the resurrection. Teach me to accept this step in true humility, knowing that you are God and know what is best. Teach me to do your will.

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:38-39

**To show that the faithful person ought to endure all adversities for the Lord's sake, the Prophet says on behalf of the suffering: *All day long we are put to death on your account; we are considered sheep for the slaughter. But they are so hopeful of divine vindication that they joyfully stay their course, saying: In all these things we triumph because of him who loved us.***

Benedict quotes the experience of St Paul, who felt that he was being put to death every day for the sake of the churches. Although we may well rise up against injustice done to others, we should expect it to be done to ourselves, and rise above it rather than against it. We can do this, because we are so hopeful of divine vindication. We 'joyfully' stay the course, or as said earlier, persevere to the end, and we know that the victory is due to Christ, and that we are loved even in the midst of adversity. Dear Lord and God, none of these steps of humility is easy. This is one of the hardest, though each can be penetrated more deeply. But help me look to the goal and believe deeply in your love and in your vindication. Help me live in the Spirit, and sing a new song, happy to walk in your way for love of you.

Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:40-41

**And in another place Scripture says something similar: *You have tried us, O God; you have tested us with fire, as silver is tested. You have led us into a trap. You have loaded our backs with trouble. And to show that we ought to be under a superior, it goes on to say: You have placed people over our heads.***

Benedict slightly labours the point, quoting more Scripture to show that we must expect and accept the limitations of Superiors, who may, for a whole series of reasons, burden us with their demands. This burden we can use for spiritual growth, by raising it up to be part of Christ's suffering, in obedience to his Father. In this way, the load is taken off us by Christ, and the burden is light. Benedict also reminds us that in this cenobitic way of life, we have vowed to be obedient to Superiors, elected to have a Superior over us. Dear Lord and God, help me to see that harsh and even unjust treatment, can be a true way of accepting your Son's cross, and imitating him in his obedience. Give me courage to follow that way.

Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:42-43

**Moreover, those who maintain patience in the face of setbacks and injustice fulfil the command of the Lord: *When they are slapped on the cheek, they present the other one as well. When someone takes their shirt, they give up their coat as well. Pressed into service for one mile, they go two. Like the Apostle Paul, they endure with disloyal brothers and persecution; they bless those who curse them.***

Benedict cites one of the hardest Gospel teachings as the ideal for the monk who faces suffering, either from his Superior or from his own brethren. Jesus' radical response to violence or injustice is to suppress the natural instinct to retaliate, and to offer a blessing instead, whether as an opportunity for your attacker to right, or as an extra gift of ones own. This, as Jesus says elsewhere, 'piles coals on head of one's enemy'. This is the reflective response of the mature and humble person who has gone beyond the reaction which is so natural. Dear Lord and God, you call us to respond to others, whether they bless or curse us, with the warmth of a brother and with love. This is your response to all that we do, good and bad. Of course you are present in the doing of any good, but you remain with us, even when we do evil. Help me grow in knowledge of the times I leave you behind and go my own misguided way. Help me turn back and repent.

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> August RB 7:44-45

**The fifth step consists in revealing through humble confession to one's abbot all evil thoughts that enter the heart, as well as the evils secretly committed. Scripture urges us on in this matter when it says: *Make plain your way to the Lord, and hope in him.***

Benedict is urging transparency and truth as a sign of humility. Indeed the more we can admit our capacity to err and do wrong, as well as acknowledge the wrongs we have done, the more we grow in self-knowledge and wisdom. The revelation of 'thoughts' to a Superior is a traditional practice of the desert monks, and a means for ongoing spiritual direction and formation. Today, Canon Law forbids the Abbot requiring confession from his monks, but he does encourage them to seek an elder who will help them grow in truth. Dear Lord and God, help me to have the humility to reveal my thoughts, and especially my past sins. Help me to find someone to assist me in ongoing formation and spiritual growth. Help me make my way plain to the Lord and hope in him.

Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> August RB 7:47-48

**The Prophet says further: *I have made my sin known to you and not hidden my injustices. I said: I will accuse myself to the Lord of my injustices. And you forgave the sin of my heart.***

Benedict is calling for true repentance, which involves both turning mind and heart back to the Lord, and speaking the truth about our sin. But there is confidence in this action, because we know, for certain, that the Lord forgives that wandering heart of ours, which has turned from him. Dear Lord and God, there are so many times that I have wandered from you and almost heading in the wrong direction. Draw me back, speak to my heart, and do not let me wander. Do not let me do ill to others, for that is the same as turning from you. Give me the compassion to serve you in others whom I meet.

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> September RB 7:49-50

**The sixth step occurs when a monk is content with low and dishonourable treatment. And regarding all that is commanded of him, he thinks of himself as a bad and worthless worker, saying with the Prophet: *I was reduced to impotence and ignorance; I was like a brute beast before you, and I am also with you.***

This is a hard step in humility, especially in the modern era. It requires us to admit that much of our action and our work presumes a competence and education that has been acquired over many years, and we regard almost as a right. If we are given work which does not presume those skills, we often feel that to be demeaning. We are not being recognised for our competence. Put like this, we can see that work is too caught up in our ego-self. This step in humility challenges us to see that work has another purpose; the build up of community in charity, and the means to maintain the community materially. In this context, it is not about ego enhancement. Hence we are content with any task, however lowly, and we do not focus on our skills and education, but our willingness to serve. Dear Lord and God, help me to tackle anything I am asked to do, and be more concerned for the other whom I serve, than on whether I have the skills for the task.

Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September RB 7:51-52

**The seventh step of humility is surmounted if a monk not only confesses with his tongue, but believes with all his heart that he is lower and less honourable than all the rest. He thus abases himself, declaring with the Prophet: *I, though, am a worm, not a man. I am the object of curses and rejection.***

This step is based upon Cassian's step eight, where the idea is clearly that our humility should be interiorised and genuine, and not something superficial and feigned. It is good to note that a story among the Jews, is that we keep two pieces of paper in our pocket – one contains the quote from the psalm 'I am a worm and no man,' but the other says, 'For me the Universe was made.' We hold this genuine humility in the depth of our heart, because we know, also in our heart, that we are loved unconditionally by God. Dear Lord and God, through faith and in love we can know our utter insignificance and importance among our fellow human beings, because we are loved by you, and for each of us the Universe is made.

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September RB:53-54

***I was raised up, but now I am humiliated and covered with confusion. Along the same line: It is good for me that you humiliate me, so that I might learn your commandments.***

Benedict recalls the experience of Christ, lifted up on the cross in utter humiliation and shame, and yet it was his moment of glory and victory over death. Benedict follows the Biblical interpretation of humiliation, namely that it is God's work, bring us closer to him and deeper in knowledge of God. This is the only valid motive for humiliation. All others tend towards the degrading of another, in order to inflate the ego of the person inflicting the humiliation. We can, however, also humble ourselves in order to know God better and learn his commands. Dear Lord and God, there are delicate balances here, when you bring us low, in order to raise us up, or when we realise that we have become over-inflated with self-righteousness. Help me be honest and true to you and to myself, so that I can be content wherever you lead me.

Monday 4<sup>th</sup> September RB 7:55

**The eighth step of humility is when a monk does nothing except what is encouraged by the common rule of the monastery and the example of the veteran members of the community.**

There is a hope, in this step of humility, that the community reflects upon the common rule and modifies it over time. Similarly, it is hoped that the veteran members of the community are the ones who live out the monastic life to the full, and are shining examples of wisdom and practice. Sadly, this is not always the case in both instances, and this step can become a formula for inertia and bad practice. However, it is meant to curb the presumption and over-enthusiasm of the young to change everything and to do things the way that they think. It is a salutary discipline to follow the common rule, and look to the example of others, before humbly suggesting change and adaptations. Dear Lord and God, we can often see how things could be done which conform to our opinion and needs, but we have come to live a common life. The common rule takes priority, and this step reminds us of that. There is ample room here for sel-will, and that needs to be questioned and your will be done. Help me to change things wisely and according to the common good.

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September RB 7:56-58

**The ninth step of humility comes when a monk holds back his tongue from speaking, and out of love for silence does not speak until someone asks him a question. Scripture shows that *In much talk one does not escape sin, and: The chatterbox does not walk straight on the earth.***

Benedict does not impose total silence. He encourages 'restraint in speech' and a love of silence. We have all met those who cannot stop talking and appear to love the sound of their own voice, or certainly their opinions and thoughts. In such floods of words, Scripture reminds us, we cannot avoid sin. A sect of Hindu holy men took a vow of silence, and discovered that on most occasions they wanted to speak or intervene in conversations, it was to enhance their own ego in some way. Thus Benedict encourages the monk to restrain his tongue, and to use it only when asked or prompted by a question. Dear Lord and God, there are times when we need to speak, especially to proclaim your truth. Help me to use my tongue for your glory, and not for mine. Help me love silence and let me listen to your voice.

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> September RB 7:59

**The tenth step of humility consists in not being quick to laugh at the slightest provocation, for it is written: *The fool raises his voice in laughter.***

There are two types of laughter, which Benedict urges us to avoid: raucous, mocking laughter, and nervous foolish laughter. Both are signs of immaturity, and he desires a growth

in wisdom and maturity among his disciples. He urges the curbing of jokes during Lent, so the monastery is clearly not envisaged as a dour place, where there is no sense of humour and laughter, which is real and unfeigned, is never heard. Indeed a total lack of laughter may be very unhealthy. Dear Lord and God, help me to regain and express a sense of humour, which goes along with mature joy. Do not let me ever indulge in mocking laughter, and help me never fear, for you are with me always.

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> September RB 7:60-61

**The eleventh step of humility is that when a monk speaks at all, he does so gently and without laughter, humbly and seriously, with few and careful words. And let him not be given to shouting, as it is written: *The wise man is known by his reticence.***

The humility manifested in this sign derives from an internal disposition. There is maturity, wisdom and peace within, which is expressed in this gentle speech, which is not joking, but is serious, which is not a flood of words, but they are carefully chosen and few in number. The idea that shouting will achieve anything, is far from his mind. Thus the man shows his wisdom in few words, spoken in and through the Spirit of God. We see an example of this later in the Porter of the monastery. Dear Lord and God, we talk of those who are loud-mouthed, and here we are urged to be the very opposite. Make me thoughtful in what I say, and may it always be gentle, short and to the point. Help me build up, rather than pull down, so that your kingdom may come.

Friday 8<sup>th</sup> September RB 7:62-63

**The twelfth step of humility is achieved when a monk's humility is not only in his heart, but is apparent in his very body to those who see him. That is, whether he is at the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on a journey, in the field or anywhere at all, whether sitting, walking or standing, let his head always be bowed and his gaze be fixed on the earth.**

Benedict is keen that a monk's humility is internalised and that his attitudes are genuine and from the heart. If this is so, then it will be manifest in all his behaviour and even in his body language and posture. However, if these bodily manifestations become conscious, there is a real danger that they are 'put on' and have more to do with the ego than with humility. The point being made here is that genuine humility will be observed in the person's whole being and bearing as well as in his words and deeds. It clarifies one point about humility – that it is not something we achieve by effort, but something which we are given by grace. The effort is in forgetting ourselves and living for God and for our neighbour. Dear Lord and God, help me more and more to focus on you and on your will, and to notice the needs of neighbour before my own. Help me respond in generosity of heart, to all the initiatives you offer.

Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September RB 7:64-66

**Constantly aware of his guilt for sins, he should consider himself to be already standing before the terrifying judgement of God. He should always repeat in his heart what the publican said in the gospel, his eyes cast downward: *Lord, I am a sinner and not worthy to raise my eyes to heaven.* And also with the Prophet: *I am bowed down and totally humbled.***

It is wise not to lose sight of our capacity for sin, because then we are always vigilant. It is not healthy to be pondering the guilt of passed sins, especially if we have admitted them and sought forgiveness. On the other hand, we know that the publican, in his prayer, found favour with God when he realised his utter dependence on God's grace, his smallness before God,

and his waywardness. To realise that one is bowed and humbled, and that only God can raise us, is a singular grace of God. Dear Lord and God, deepen my realisation of my capacity for sin, and help me realise how much I depend on your grace, your mercy and your forgiveness. I need you more than ever and desire to be raised up by you.

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> September RB 7:67-68

**Therefore, when he has climbed all these steps of humility the monk will soon arrive at that *perfect love of God which drives out fear*. Due to this love, he can now begin to accomplish effortlessly, as if spontaneously, everything that he previously did out of fear.**

Our goal, our end in manifesting all these aspects of humility, is God. We realise his perfect love for us, and are able to return that love through his grace. This leaves no room for fear in us. before, there was a tendency to be driven by fear and to achieve the signs of humility by our own efforts. But now, we realise that the effort is God's, drawing us towards that perfect love, in which we are so reluctant to participate – for we do not understand that it is freedom, from ourselves and from fear. Dear Lord and God, our eyes are blind and our minds and hearts closed to the freedom you give to us. Move me closer to that realisation and that freedom from fear, that I may live in your love and accomplish your will, effortlessly and spontaneously.

Monday 11<sup>th</sup> September RB 7:69-70

**He will do this no longer out of fear of hell but out of love for Christ, good habit itself and delight in virtue. Once his worker has been cleansed of vices and sins, the Lord will graciously make all this shine forth in him by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Benedict inserts the motive of 'love for Christ' to make it clear that the whole work of humility is motivated in the end, by love, not by fear. In the last verse, it is also clear that the whole process has been a cleansing by the Spirit, who finally shines forth in the person who has undergone this cleansing. The Spirit is revealed as the real agent of change and transformation, from fear to love. Dear Lord and God, enable me to act out of love, not fear. Lead me through the process of cleansing from vices and sins and help me see the consequences of sins and be moved to change.