**Chapter 7: Humility**

January 26, May 27, September 26

*The first step of humility, then, is that a man keeps “the fear of God always before his eyes” (Ps. 35[36]:2) and never forget it. He must constantly remember everything God has commanded, keeping in mind that all who despise God will burn in hell for their sins, and all who fear God have everlasting life awaiting them. While he guards himself at every moment from sins and vices of thought or tongue, of hand or foot, of self-will or bodily desire, let him recall that he is always seen by God in heaven, that his actions everywhere are in God’s sight and are reported by angels at every hour.*

This first step points out that the humble cannot be their own context. Our humanity needs something, someone that is experienced as somehow bigger than us. In this experience we are humbled. The parent holding, for the first time, their new-born baby; the Milky Way on a pitch-black night; the crash of an ocean as it breaks down a cliff-face; or perhaps the diagnosis of a major illness: in all this and more is the experience of life in context. In these, egocentricity can bend and crack.

These experiences are also the chances for God. Any experience that shakes self-focus has in it the chance for reverence. These are the times of humble silence. Words spoil moments like these. In the awe and wonder of reverence God can be seen.

The God-seeker, indeed anyone who searches for context in life, can eventually come to see that it is this mysterious presence (the One we call God, because we do not know God’s name) who is ultimate context. The God-life holds all life in being. Ultimately, we are not our own creation. Divine love moves in all the humbling events of life, drawing those who listen into an awe for life and a reverence of God. For the self-conscious, reverence of God is good therapy.

Here Benedict also uses hell for context as well as God. The hell in life also humbles, if we let it. Actions not tending towards self-lessness, these are the acts of hellish consequence. How often have we done something with what we thought was the best of intentions, only to find that we were not serving the good, at least not enough? We are experts in our own self-deception. The good news, though, is that hell is not ultimate.

The burn of this hell is the awareness of how we get in the way of the good; the way we live life separated from the depths of love in our hearts. There are sacrifices, because of love, that we are not willing (or able) to make because we are too caught up in what we see as our own survival.

The god of this hell is a god of fear. The true God is love; love is mercy and forgiveness. The ‘report-card god’ of hell on earth is the consequence of us not knowing God well enough. This god lurks in all of us. Egocentricity feeds it. Meditation and a community of love gently reveal this god; a humbling experience.

The humble heart is a heart human and divine. This heart shows us that life mortal and immortal is possible now. Benedict wants us to have this heart. Without humility, we cannot have it and the seeing of God will have to wait for another time, or after time. It is the humble of heart who see God.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children – and that is what we are! The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. My dear friends, we are already God's children, but what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he really is. (1 John 3:1-2, RNJB)