**Chapter 7: Humility**

January 29, May 30, September 29

*Accordingly, if “the eyes of the Lord are watching the good and the wicked” (Prov. 15:3), if at all times “the Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see whether any understand and seek God” (Ps. 13[14]:2); and if every day the angels assigned to us report our deeds to the Lord day and night, then, monks, we must be vigilant every hour or, as the Prophet says in the psalm, God may observe us “falling” at some time into evil and “so made worthless” (Ps. 13[14]:3). After sparing us for a while because he is a loving father who waits for us to improve, he may tell us later, “This you did, and I said nothing” (Ps. 51[50]:21).*

It was St. Hesychios the Priest who said, “Whoever places his [sic] confidence in himself [sic] and not in God will indeed fall headlong.” The humble know that self-confidence is best grounded in the deep of us, where who we are and who God is are at one in Christ. Deep watchfulness flows from here, not a watching that is anxious or self-consciousness, but one that simply notices from the heart. This noticing then gently shapes attitude and behaviour. It is a noticing that does not notice itself: conscious, not self-conscious.

This is the virtue of vigilance. Over time we can live more and more naturally from this virtue. Vigilance becomes less of a focus or something to perform because we are simply living out of that which vigilance guards: the heart. Watchfulness has become a habit of Spirit and spirit together.

The humble know that within them there are mis-truths that can speak of worthlessness, that can compel all to be less than they are. These are tendencies that we, by ourselves, can find too difficult to regulate. Having experienced these tendencies, the humble know that they, if they are to be vigilant, need God.

This vigilance is all about being conscious. The conscious are not caught up in their own commentary on life. They are present and engaged in life as it happens. The mantra is our word of vigilance because it draws attention away from self-commentary and into the heart.

Our experience of community helps us to see that growing in vigilance is important. It is important in community that we are not scrupulous about behaviour, both ours and others. We cannot control how we are perceived. Scrupulousness can all too easily lead to over-zealousness and anxiety: extremes of self-conscious (egoic) vigilance. It is important to note here that gentleness and compassion are the hallmarks of heartfelt vigilance. In community we have the chance to grow in this gentleness and compassion.

Living and reflecting on the rule can often leave us with the question: ‘who is God?’. Here the question rises again. Paradoxically, the contemplative heart of Christianity invites us to go beyond this question, to put it aside. It is a question we need not figure out. Instead, we wait for an answer to this question in the experience of community and in silence. And what have we experienced? A God ultimately beyond words; a God of loving wisdom, always in touch with our hearts; a God who sees the reality and possibility of our lives; a divinity of the big picture who invites us to let go and simply live; a God of challenge, ready to disturb; a God stirring us to vigilance.

'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Matthew 24:42-44, RNJB)