**Chapter 7: Humility**

January 30, May 31, September 30

*The second step of humility is that a monk love not their own will nor take pleasure in the satisfaction of their desires; rather they shall imitate by their actions that saying of the Lord: “I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). Similarly we read, “Consent merits punishment; constraint wins a crown.”*

Here, on the second rung of humility, Benedict takes things a step further and asks us not take *pleasure* in the satisfaction of desire, to not *love* our own will.

At the heart of loving our own will is the attachment to the satisfaction of desire. This attachment is powerful because of the gratification that this satisfaction of desire imparts. If this attachment is not addressed with genuine and practical loving, one that asks us to be other-centred, then life will become, principally, the self-indulgent pursuit of gratification.

God’s will can be described as a “continuous self-giving in love[[1]](#footnote-1)”. While ever we are moving in harmony with this self-giving love, we are ‘doing God’s will’. It is a great challenge for us to live and move in this harmony because of our attachment. Many times, in the experience of life and relationship, we discover that to do our own will is not the loving thing – both for ourselves and for others.

In and with our desiring there can be legitimate needs. The sooner we can see and experience what self-giving in love is, the sooner we are able to discern between what is genuine need and what is want (desire). When we experience what real love is, there is also the opportunity to be in harmony with it.

Love gives because it is self-giving. It does not draw attention to itself – it is humble. Anonymous acts of kindness like emptying the dishwasher, buying milk, filling the sugar, flowers given, all these are giving for the sake of loving others and not for our own sake: the attention is not on us.

Jesus teaches us what real love is. To say “I have come not to do my own will, but the will of the One who sent me” is to say I am here to be loving and nothing else. True fulfilment in life is the living of a loving life, no matter the cost.

Practically, humility is the way of curbing the satisfaction of desire; a way of constraining ego for its own transformation. Humility teaches us that life is about fulfilment, not short-term gratification. As we act humbly, we learn more deeply what a loving life is.

Humility is found in the necessities of life together. What is essential for the functioning of a loving life together has in its practice a humility that is learning about love via the experience of love. Parents discover this in what they must sacrifice in loving their children; a husband, a wife, in what they sacrifice for the other’s life and purpose. It is no different in other types of community. Love is not ‘I want this now!’ The doing of love is doing what is practically other-centred and self-giving – and thoroughly ordinary. To be loving is to be humble. This genuine loving naturally brings us into harmony with the source of all being within and around us.

And we grow in this humble love as we attend to the mantra – another necessity of life for those who choose it. Over time, the gratifications that come from the following of distraction lessen. We then live out this lessening in the ways we love each other.

This is my commandment, that you should love one another, as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall no longer call you servants, because the servant does not what the master is doing. I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you, and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. These are my commandments to you, that you should love one another. (John 15:12-17, RNJB)

1. Laurence Freeman, Christian Meditation Newsletter, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)