**Chapter 7: Humility**

January 31, June 1, October 1

*The third step of humility is that a monk submits to their superior in all obedience for the love of God, imitating the Lord of whom the Apostle says: “He became obedient even to death” (Phil 2.8).*

The humility implicit in chapter five (on obedience) is now made explicit here. If we wish to become the love each can uniquely be, if we are to be, now, the everlasting life that is to come – then we need to become more and more humble. Again, to be humble is to be ourselves. We are made by Love to be love.

There is no love without sacrifice. Sacrifice is the offering of ourselves for and in love. In the deep of love is the simple and humble question: what am I willing to die for? As we humbly grow in love, the answer to this question swells the heart. Is it our children? Our community? Our vision for life? This part of chapter seven asks us to discover for ourselves our cross: what is it that exposes your heart; what makes it compassion? What are you willing to die for?

A humble life is never lukewarm. The mantra and community teach us this. Each day is a learning in saying yes to what practical love involves. Each day can be an assent (and descent) of the ladder. In each temptation to distraction, and in each resistance to co-operation, lives an invitation to die to the ego. The journey of attention into love is indeed a humbling one.

Growing in humility is also about giving up control. This is a hard lesson. Our desires to control are often about survival. Humility asks us to go beyond, to transcend, the survival instinct. This can only be done in a loving and safe environment. In community, with grace, we can move beyond fight, flight, or freeze. We can become vulnerable. A loving heart is not fearful; it is willing and vulnerable. A vulnerable heart is empty of power so that the power of love may fill it.

What happens, though, if the community is not safe enough for this vulnerability? In particular, what do we do if the leader is not representing Christ and our instinct to survive stirs? Where is humility here? Humility is not about submission to abuse. Humility will be in how we approach the situation: including others, without regard to ambition, practically and gently speaking to the ways we believe leadership has strayed from Christ. In this we express something of the ‘inner abbot’ that Christ is for all who follow the rule.

Christian leadership is vulnerable leadership; it is open to what each of us, uniquely, has to offer. This can involve dialogue. In dialogue we learn what it is to affirm ourselves and to be affirmed by others. Together we can come to a deeper appreciation of viewpoints and motivations. And then in saying yes to what community might ask of us, we are free to discover ourselves in our decisions for communal life.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive in love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or sympathy, make my joy complete by being of a single mind, having the same love, the same aims and the same mind. Do nothing out of rivalry or vanity; instead, out of humility consider each other to be better than yourselves, everyone looking not to their own interests but those of others. Let the same mind be in you as was also in Christ Jesus: (Philippians 2:1-5, RNJB).