**Chapter 7: Humility**

February 1, June 2, October 2

*The fourth step of humility is that in this obedience under difficult, unfavourable, or even unjust conditions, our hearts quietly embrace suffering and endure it without weakening or seeking escape. For Scripture has it: “Anyone who perseveres to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22), and again, “Be brave of heart and rely on the Lord” (Ps. 26[27]:14). Another passage shows how the faithful must endure everything, even contradiction, for the Lord’s sake, saying in the person of those who suffer, “For your sake we are put to death continually; we are regarded as sheep marked for slaughter” (Rom. 8:36; Ps. 43[44]:22). They are so confident in their expectation of reward from God that they continue joyfully and say, “But in all this we overcome because of him who so greatly loved us” (Rom. 8:37). Elsewhere Scripture says: “O God, you have tested us, you have tried us as silver is tried by fire; you have led us into a snare, you have placed afflictions on our backs” (Ps. 65[66]:10-11). Then, to show us that we ought to be under a superior, it adds: “You have placed men over our heads” (Ps. 65[66]:12).*

*In truth, those who are patient amid hardships and unjust treatment are fulfilling the Lord’s command: “When struck on one cheek, they turn the other; when deprived of their coat, they offer their cloak also; when pressed into service for one mile, they go two” (Matt. 5:38-41). With the Apostle Paul, they bear with “false brothers, endure persecution, and bless those who curse them” (2 Cor. 11:26; 1 Cor. 4:12).*

On this next step towards the fullness of humility we are told that we are going to suffer. This can be hard to accept. However, being committed enough to each other and to the project of community means (at times) living in conditions not of our choosing, conditions ‘difficult, unfavourable, or even unjust’. This is a reality readily known to anyone who commits to loving others amid the variables of life.

As we persevere in the circumstances we are in, we gently and patiently (as we can) observe our responses and reactions. In this observing we have the chance to experience our distress and unease and receive insight into the workings of our humanity. This is growth in self-knowledge. This growth involves suffering; it is a suffering that is about our reactions to circumstance and people than anything else.

Someone who is not a morning person may struggle with morning prayer. The more introverted may find things done together a challenge; the extroverted may find meditation more demanding. We may find that one (or more) of our number find it a challenge to like us, and so we are treated unfairly. Perhaps the reality of what needs to be done is crowding out time for what is drawing the heart: what am I to do with my building resentment? Why is someone refusing to do their share? Why do I spend so much time avoiding someone, or preferring the company of another? Within curious circumstance, and within the unsatisfying and the unjust, are the seeds of our suffering.

We do not grow in humility if we just give up in the midst of difficulty, refusing to see what learnings there might be for us. Yes, particular situations and people (including ourselves) may be, at times, just too hard to bear. However, these times are not sufficient reason to give up on the long term, the big picture. Humility grows in the seeing and acceptance of what it is in us that causes suffering.

It is natural to want to change things, to avoid things, so as not to suffer; it is even at times important and necessary that we do so. Generally, we would prefer to avoid the experience. However, there are times when avoidance is not in the best interests of community life, nor in the best interests of our growth. Together, in honesty and fragile love, we can learn to discern the flavour of our suffering and how best to approach it. We do not do this alone.

Growing humility gives us growing space to engage suffering creatively. In time, the humble see challenging circumstances as ways to be, primarily, creative. There is more that the creative Spirit can do with a humble heart – often in ways hidden and ordinary, ways that have the preservation of relationship uppermost in mind. Good community leadership can be creative in this way.

At the heart of suffering is a divine compassion that longs to show us to ourselves. This can only be done if we are humble enough. Thus, humility grows in the rule’s creative response to suffering. And so, not even our suffering is in vain: it becomes a graced way into joy. In suffering's transformation there is compassion for us.

Can separate us from the love of Christ – can hardship or distress, or persecution, or lack of food or clothing, or dangers or the sword? As it is written: For your sake we are being put to death all day long, reckoned as sheep to be slaughtered. No, through him who loved us we are more than conquers in all these things. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor heights nor depths, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us and the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39, RNJB)