**Chapter 7: Humility**

February 2, June 3, October 3

*The fifth step of humility is that monks do not conceal from the abbot any sinful thoughts entering our hearts, or any wrongs committed in secret, but rather confess them humbly. Concerning this Scripture exhorts us: “Make known your way to the Lord and hope in him” (Ps. 36[37]:5). And again, “Confess to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy is forever” (Ps. 105[106]:1; 117[118]:1). So too the Prophet: “To you I have acknowledged my offence; my faults I have not concealed. I have said: Against myself I will report my faults to the Lord, and you have forgiven the wickedness of my heart” (Ps. 31[32]:5).*

We can be told these days that we are our own experts on life. To an extent this may be true, however a sign of this growing expertise is the realisation that we, by ourselves, do not really know much. Life holds more mystery than anything else. Growing in humility is to experience this and to accept it. Healthy community has people in it who have depthed enough in this mysterious expertise and are still growing in it. These people, those who are ‘experts’ on ascending the ladder, are often the most loving and compassionate among us – though, at first glance, this may not be obvious. Still, their ongoing journey into mercy has become a presence and guide for others. When our own journey becomes too much, it can be a time to seek help from these wise ones.

We can see the sharing of our frailties and shortcomings as a big risk. We find ourselves coming up against a wall of internal resistance. Will I be rejected, judged, condemned? Will this so-called wise one be as hard on me as others have been, or as hard as I have been on myself? Will they expose the hidden ‘truth’ I tell myself, that I am not not good enough? Will what I fear most come to pass: my own rejection and alienation?

Benedict attempts to console us with words from the Psalms: hope, mercy, goodness, forgiveness – these are words of divine truth, descriptors of divine life and intention. The Godly are of these, with them there is nothing to fear.

However, often we do not say much about our own internal struggles with ourselves and others until it becomes too much to bear. Speaking something in anger and resentment can risk the health of our relating and take a lot of negotiation to work our way through. If we are committed enough to the communal life, then this negotiating can become great blessing. It could be, however, something that we are not yet ready enough for. Often the communal life is about learning to live with the ways we all struggle to be with ourselves and each other. This is why it is so important to have the ways we are transformed by divine love held at the heart of community life.

Learning to share our struggles with wise and loving leadership is one way into this divine transformation. The wise and compassionate are discrete, and our sharing can be a way through which grace can move and heal. Humility is a fruit of this sharing. And part of this process may involve sharing our struggles, as gently and honestly as we can, with those we are struggling with.

It is important that community members practice honesty and sharing with each other. One advantage of committing to these times is that we have the chance to learn what it is to experience and perhaps move through our own internal resistances. It may be that all we can do to sit quietly with them, practicing gentle awareness, without thought or condemnation.

We may speak growing in the knowledge that we live in a world of our own limited perceptions and projections. At these meetings we practice speaking (and discovering) the truth about ourselves and others in growing love and forgiveness. This is a humbling practice.

It may be that we speak with leaders and teachers outside the immediate community. It may be too hard for us, or perhaps not appropriate, that we share with others we live with. There is value in seeking the counsel of a broader leadership supporting us.

And, of course, throughout all this a community can pray and meditate together – another way at the heart of community through which divine love transforms and heals. In meditation we practice forgetting our worries and anxieties. In this, God secretly heals and prepares us for all that the communal life has to offer; its purpose and meaning, its joy and challenge.

Finally, you should all be of one mind and be sympathetic; love the brothers and sisters, tender hearted and humble. Do not repay one wrong with another, or abuse with abuse; instead, repay with a blessing, for you were called to this in order to inherit a blessing." (1Peter 3:8-9, RNJB)