**Chapter 7: Humility**

February 3, June 4, October 4

*The sixth step of humility is that a monk is content with the lowest and most menial treatment, and regards themselves as a poor and worthless worker in whatever task they are given, saying to themselves with the Prophet: “I am insignificant and ignorant, no better than a beast before you, yet I am with you always” (Ps. 72[73]:22-23).*

What is the most menial task you can think of? Cleaning the toilet? Sorting the rubbish? Are you content in doing it? And what might our response be if someone ignores us as we work away on our lowly task?

To be growing in humility is to be more and more at ease with whatever needs to be done and with whatever we are asked to do. The humble do not avoid what others might consider lowly tasks; there is no preference for roles that signal a certain identity and status. The humble experience a contentment that is not attached to status and perception. This contentment is then naturally expressed in whatever needs to be done.

Growing in humility is about attention becoming grounded in the stability that is self and God together in the heart. In this stability any reaction to the menial vanishes. In this stability prejudiced or restrictive treatment is experienced as completely foreign to who the humble know themselves to be: beloved children of God. Becoming humble is seeing with divine eyes and knowing with a divine heart. Attachment to status gets in the way of this sight and knowledge.

This part of chapter seven is not about having a low self-esteem. Humility is not this. Instead, humility is about a healthy self-esteem, one that is not caught up in the insecurity and judgement that attachment to task as status can bring.

There is an openness to circumstance that happens when we are free enough of self-image as definitive, of attachment to idea as identity, of thought generally. This is what it is to be poor in mind as well as spirit. This poverty is not only developed and confirmed as we say the mantra; it also happens as we clean the toilet, as we take out the rubbish, or do whatever we might secretly see as somehow ‘beneath’ us. All this is a work of humility that undermines and transforms attitudes getting in the way of our journey into the God-life.

Jesus modelled for us what Benedict highlights here when he washed the feet of his first disciples (John 13:12-15). This washing would normally be done by household servants and slaves. Peter was understandably affronted by Jesus’ actions. And yet this self-emptying (kenosis) of image and status is consistent with the God-life – a life all about self-forgotten (ego-less) service. To grow in humility is to grow in this service.

Let the same mind be in you as was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, born in human likeness, and found in human shape; he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8, RNJB)