

Dear Brothers and Sisters

The Steps of Humility & Pride



Bernard of Clairvaux

It was not enough for him to enter the monastery himself! At age twenty-three he brought thirty other men with him to the Citeaux, including several members of his own family.

When he spoke publicly to convince others to go with him, he was so persuasive that women clung to their husbands and sons to prevent them from going to hear him!

After just two years in Citeaux, he was made Abbot of a new monastery in Clairvaux. We know him as Bernard of Clairvaux, his feast day is this week, Monday August 20th.

One of his brother monks, Godfrey, asked him to write out at greater length a sermon he gave on the Steps of Humility. Bernard responded that he could only teach what he knew, and therefore was able to describe the steps of pride, rather than humility:

I could not very well describe the way up because I am more used to falling down than climbing. I can only tell you what I know myself, the downward path. However, if you study them carefully, you will find the way up. If you are going to Rome who can tell you the way better than one you meet coming from there?

The Steps of Pride:

1. Curiosity: when the eyes and the other senses attend to what is not one's concern.
2. Levity of mind: known by words that bespeak unreasonable joy and sadness.
3. Silly mirth: with over-much laughing.
4. Boasting and too much talking.
5. Singularity: proud esteem of one's own ways.
6. Self-assertion: believing one is holier than others.
7. Presumption: meddling with everything.
8. Defending one's sins.
9. Hypocritical confession: which can be tested by harsh reproof.
10. Rebellion against superiors and brethren.
11. Freedom in sinning.
12. The habit of sin.

In the first six steps we find contempt for others, in the next four, contempt for the superior; in the last two, contempt for God.

These words of St. Bernard were written for a fellow Monk. What do they have to do with us? We do not live in a monastery. True, but nevertheless we are called to be monks, spiritually. 'Monk' comes from 'monos', meaning 'one'. Our soul is created to be one with God.

If we find ourselves on one of the steps of Pride, we need only travel in the reverse direction to reach our goal, Humility. It was not enough for him to enter the monastery himself! At age twenty-three he brought thirty other men with him to the Citeaux, including several members of his own family.

When he spoke publicly to convince others to go with him, he was so persuasive that women clung to their husbands and sons to prevent them from going to hear him!

After just two years in Citeaux, he was made Abbot of a new monastery in Clairvaux. We know him as Bernard of Clairvaux, his feast day is this week, Monday August 20th.

One of his brother monks, Godfey, asked him to write out at greater length a sermon he gave on the Steps of Humility. Bernard responded that he could only teach what he knew, and therefore was able to describe the steps of pride, rather than humility:

I could not very well describe the way up because I am more used to falling down than climbing. I can only tell you what I know myself, the downward path. However, if you study them carefully, you will find the way up. If you are going to Rome who can tell you the way better than one you meet coming from there?

The Steps of Pride:

1. Curiosity: when the eyes and the other senses attend to what is not one's concern.
2. Levity of mind: known by words that bespeak unreasonable joy and sadness.
3. Silly mirth: with over-much laughing.
4. Boasting and too much talking.
5. Singularity: proud esteem of one's own ways.
6. Self-assertion: believing one is holier than others.
7. Presumption: meddling with everything.
8. Defending one's sins.
9. Hypocritical confession: which can be tested by harsh reproof.
10. Rebellion against superiors and brethren.
11. Freedom in sinning.
12. The habit of sin.

In the first six steps we find contempt for others, in the next four, contempt for the superior; in the last two, contempt for God.

These words of St. Bernard were written for a fellow Monk. What do they have to do with us? We do not live in a monastery. True, but nevertheless we are called to be monks, spiritually. 'Monk' comes from 'monos', meaning 'one'. Our soul is created to be one with God.

If we find ourselves on one of the steps of Pride, we need only travel in the reverse direction to reach our goal, Humility.

Fr. Sean