

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH
SUNDAY, MARCH 26, 2023**

“ADVICE ON HUMILITY FROM THREE SAINTS”

True confessions time: I read the funny pages in the newspaper every day. I already read them this morning! So I always read “Peanuts”—they are old re-runs from long ago because the cartoonist, Charles Schultz, has moved on from this world many years ago.

In one of his episodes, crabby Lucy is giving her brother, Linus (the boy always holding a security blanket), a hard time. She is telling him about all his faults. Linus responds, “Lucy, why do you always criticize me?” Lucy answers, “Because I have a special gift of noticing other people’s faults.” Then Linus says, “But what about your own faults?”. Lucy’s reply was, “I have a special gift for not noticing mine!” (in “Our Daily Bread”, 8/4/90)

Looks like Lucy had a problem with the sin called pride. We know we have it when we see others’ faults, but not our own. And it is a very deadly sin.

Today, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, each year our Orthodox Church especially commemorates our great father in the Faith, St. John of the Ladder (sometimes you hear him called St. John Climacus....Climacus means “of the Ladder” in Greek.) This good and godly man was the abbot of St. Katherine Monastery on Mt. Sinai in 600 A.D. 1400 years ago. (By the way, that monastery is still going strong!) What he is most famous for is a book he wrote called “The Ladder of Divine Ascent”. It is a spiritual guide book looking at the matter of growing closer to God by breaking it down into 30 steps of a ladder. It has been a hugely influential book in our history, and is usually considered to be, except for the Bible itself, the greatest book ever of its kind.

30 steps---but we will just look at one today! Step #25=humility. It is so, so important. St. John describes it this way---It is “an indescribable wealth, a gift from God.” And---“Holy humility opens heaven’s gates.” (Ladder of Divine Ascent, Paulist Press, 1982, pp. 219, 221)

If, as St. John writes, humility opens the gates of heaven, it is certainly something for us to strive for. St. Peter talks about it in I Peter 5:5---“Be clothed with humility.” To be clothed means to cover ourselves with clothing. Being clothed is an action, something we do. And so becoming humble requires action---it won’t just happen on its own.

Now let us jump to a modern Saint, who just left this world to be in God's presence not much more than 20 years ago---Paisios of Mt. Athos. We have volumes of his teachings as people wrote down much of what he said. Perhaps more than any other Saint, he stressed the need for humility. And like St. Peter, he said there had to be action on our part, in cooperation with the grace of God, for us to become humble.

I've put together a little list to summarize some of what he said about what we need to do to defeat pride and get humble. 5 ways, 5 points-----

1. Pray for humility. Pray *hard*!
2. Think of others as being better than yourself.
3. Be just the opposite of Lucy----notice your own sins, and don't notice the sins of other people.
4. Spend much time specifically asking God's mercy. A couple of good prayers for that are some we are familiar with!---"Lord, have mercy" and "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."
5. Maybe the toughest of the 5-----ask God to cause things in your life to help you get humble. Situations, people, circumstances that will humble you. Not easy to pray like that!

All 5 are actions we can take to become humble. St. Peter said we need to act, we need to "clothe" ourselves with humility. And St. Paisios recommends these 5 specific actions. If we don't strive for humility but just live on in pride, pride will win out. And it will spiritually destroy us.

So, ask God to help you---and then go ahead and work with those 5 ways. Others throughout the years have tried different ways to get humble. The English writer, Charles Lamb, had an unusual personality. And he tried an unusual way to get humble. There was an opening night in 1806 in London for a new play of his. He was so excited about that he made sure he attended this first performance and sat right up front. Unfortunately, the play didn't go over well with the audience. As it was performed there started to be heard negative comments from the audience and even a bit of booing. Charles Lamb at that point stood up and loudly booed his own play. That is one way to work towards humility! (Complete Works & Letters of Charles Lamb, Modern Library, 1935, p. xxiv) But I think St. Paisios' 5 ways are better!

So, if you wish to become humble, pay attention to what St. Paisios said. And ask him to pray for you as you fight your own personal pride. And ask St. John of the Ladder and the Holy Apostle Peter to pray for you, too. For as you know, these 3 wonderful Saints are not dead! They are very much alive, standing before God and worshipping and praying----why not get on their prayer list? Ask them---and they

will pray for you. And as St. James wrote in his epistle---the prayers of a righteous man are very powerful in their effects.

May God make us humble! That would be a wonderful thing, for as St. John of the Ladder wrote----“Holy humility opens heaven’s gates.”