



Father Augustine Wetta
January 29, 2010

“King David, Humility, and Benedict’s Twelve-Step-Plan”

So in our first reading today, King David is having an afternoon stroll on the roof of his palace when he catches sight of the beautiful wife of Uriah taking a bath. Now, objectively speaking, there isn’t anything wrong with admiring the beauty of the human form. But of course, that wasn’t why David was looking at her—and looking lead to longing and longing lead to scheming and the scheming lead to an illicit love affair which resulted in an illegitimate child; and if all that wasn’t bad enough, David wrapped up the whole sordid sequence of events by killing Bathsheba’s husband! It’s funny how easily one surreptitious glance can evolve into such a terrible act; and it’s shocking how quickly—yet, almost imperceptibly—the great King David slipped from casual interest to infatuation to paranoia to murderous obsession. And yet...to this day, we remember David as the greatest of Israel’s kings. He is mentioned by name almost a thousand times in the bible. Jesus himself is repeatedly called “the Son of David”—he even compares himself to David, and on more than one occasion. So how is it that this David who did such horrible things could still be remembered with such fondness?

The answer is in the psalm we sang this morning. Tradition has it that David wrote it:

Have mercy on me, God in your kindness;
In your compassion, blot out my offense
Wash me more and more from my guilt
And cleanse me from my sin.
For I acknowledge my offense,
and my sin is always before me:
Against you, you alone have I sinned.
I have done such evil in your sight
that you are just in your sentence,
and blameless when you condemn.

In an age when we delight in celebrity scandals, when every apology is prefaced by a disclaimer and followed by an excuse, when shock radio and reality television have elevated sleaze to an art form...it’s astonishing to hear a political leader admit frankly that he has done evil. You’d expect David to say something more along the lines of, “I apologize to anyone who may have been offended by any misinterpretation of what I might have done...when I was provoked.” But



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that isn't David's way. "I have done evil in your sight" he says, "and you are just in your sentence."

The truth is, if we look closely and honestly at ourselves and our own behavior, we will recognize the same potential for evil in ourselves. The important thing is that we do not give in to despair. And the way you do this, says Saint Benedict, is "to believe that God is always with you", "to be vigilant every hour", but above all, to "keep the fear of God before your eyes." In other words, the solution to this problem of our capacity for evil is...humility—the frank, honest admission of our weaknesses.

Now, it is well known throughout Saint Louis Abbey (and I'm sure many of you in the school suspect it already) that I am the most humble monk in the monastery. So I am going to share with you my secret to true humility. It's a twelve-step, fool-proof, crash course in pride-loss, and I am offering it to you, free of charge, for a limited time only. No dieting, no strenuous workouts, just follow these twelve simple steps and watch your pride melt away. Here they are:



Step

1. Keep the fear of God always before your eyes. It's better to love God, but when you're not feeling the love, at least feel the fear. "Keep in mind," says Saint Benedict, "that all who despise God will burn in hell for their sins."
2. Don't be in love with your own will. In fact, on a regular basis, deny yourself something. Just to show your will that you're in charge.
3. Obey your parents (if you're a monk, obey your abbot, if you're married, obey your spouse. There's always someone who deserves your obedience. And all of us obey the teachings of the Church.)
4. Embrace suffering when it comes your way. Don't go looking for it, but if you have to suffer, remember that Jesus suffered, and that this is an opportunity to suffer with him. In so doing, you will help redeem the world.
5. Go to confession. And when you do, try to think of that one thing you REALLY don't want to mention—then mention it.
6. Be content when you're treated badly. Remember that if someone insults you, there must be some level on which you deserve it. And what's more, every insult is an opportunity to practice humbling yourself.
7. Remember that there is something you're bad at. No one is good at everything, and everyone is good at something.
8. Do what you're told when you're told it. Or better yet, watch the people you respect, and imitate them.
9. Learn to love silence. As the saying goes, it's better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.
10. Be careful what you laugh at. The funniest jokes are almost always cruel.
11. When you do speak, speak gently.
12. (drum roll please) Be careful where you look. King David had to learn this lesson the hard way.

In this manner, says Saint Benedict, having ascended all these steps of humility, you will arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear. Having sown that tiny mustard seed of humility, the Kingdom of heaven will spring up in your soul and become a great tree and put forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky will dwell in its shade."



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In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

By the way...when I said that the twelve-step humility plan was “my secret,” I didn’t mean to imply that it was mine or that it was secret. I actually stole the idea for my homily from Antonio, our Chilean guest; and I plagiarized the twelve steps from the seventh chapter of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, which I have copied and put on the little tables by all the doors of the church in case you want to read them for yourself. You’re welcome to take a copy on your way out. In the meantime, I am sincerely regretful to any who may have misinterpreted what I might have said and may have unintentionally done.

Fr. Augustine Wetta

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