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Meekness the Unpopular Virtue

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The founder of the martial art Aikido has stated that the “Ultimate challenge... is to turn an enemy’s fearful wrath into harmless laughter.” Morihei Ueshiba founded this martial art as a pure defensive act in which a person redirects an attack to the degree that the attacker is brought down in laughter. If done correctly the aggressor recognizes the absurdity of their anger and violence.

Aikido sounds almost like the virtue of meekness. St. Thomas Aquinas defines it as the virtue that “...moderates anger and its disorderly effects. It is a form of temperance that controls every inordinate movement of resentment at another person’s character or behavior.” It’s the virtue a that allows us to remain ourselves in the midst of adversity.

According to St. Hilary, “Christ dwells in us by our meekness of soul. When we are overcome by anger, we lose that sense of ourselves that allows God to dwell within us. Anger excludes God; meekness invites His presence.”

Meekness is not cowardness; it’s the virtue that restrains. It prevents evil from completely overcoming the person who is already suffering enough from evil.

Consider the account of Jesus’ arrest. When it was unfolding the soldiers fully expected one of two things. They expected him to run as the disciple did in Mark 14:51-52 or respond by offering violence for violence as Peter did in John 18:10. We see in that account that violence and anger only beget violence and anger.

In fact, Jesus was the embodiment of meekness. His stepping forward with the direct question “Whom are you looking for? (John 18:7) “was so contrary to what the soldiers expected and were used to that they had to drop their swords in amazement. For a moment the cycle of anger, fear and violence was vanquished by courage and meekness. The direct act of Jesus laying down His life begins with a radical act of meekness. “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again (John 10:18).

It can be tempting as we defend human life from conception to natural death to become tired and frustrated. I remember a moment when I prayed outside an abortion facility. The pro-abortion escorts were as violently verbal as they could be. In fact, one had a bullhorn in front of me so that the prayers I



was leading could not be heard. It was frustrating and angering. As I began to get frustrated a short, elderly, vibrant and habited Dominican nun broke the crowd and stood next to me in prayer. She whispered “Don’t worry Father if any #@! Goes down I got your back!” Her meek example was an anchor of inspiration and fortitude for me that day.

What do we mean when we say that the Church is built on the blood of the martyrs? *Plures efficimur, quitiens metimus a vobis: semen est sanguis Christianorum* is translated to mean “...the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” Simply put the manner of how the martyrs died was synonymous with how they lived. John 13:35 stated “They will know you are my disciples by your love of one another.” The earliest Christian communities had their issues (Read St. Paul) but the manner of which they lived was in such contradiction to the values of the world that the faith spread the living Paschal experience far and wide.

These earliest Christians died how they lived. In their persecution there was an active movement to forgive, evangelize and encourage each other. They did not die as others did. In fact, there are several historical accounts when they were meek and as a result the world has never been the same.

In defense of all human life the virtue of meekness stands paramount as a strategic ally. St. John Paul II states that “We are now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has gone through.” He has also stated that “Yours is the gigantic task of overcoming all evil with good, always trying amidst the problems of life to place your trust in God, knowing that his grace supplies strength to human weakness. You must oppose every form of hatred with the invincible power of Christ’s love.”

The Church has never lacked saints and martyrs. If we are looking around and we do not see one then guess what? Its our invitation to be one.

The culture of death is an en-fleshment of vice which can only be counteracted by radical virtue. Laziness is rescued by radical fortitude and zeal. Pride is rescued by humility. Anger is rescued by truth and mercy. Imagine if we followed the words of St. John Paul II in his book *Love and Responsibility*. In the book he pushes the reader to consider heroic virtue. “When you love someone, you take their destiny as your responsibility!” Imagine if we stood against those who promote the Culture of Death and objectification of the human person with that sort of paradigm.

When we approach the vices of the Culture of Death with virtue we are engaging in a form of “Spiritual Aikido.” Radical virtue (Especially love) demonstrates the absurdity of fear, hatred, anger and violence.

Creation was radically re-oriented due to the Incarnation. That historical-cosmic event in which the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The Incarnation demonstrates the absurdity of pride through the radical act of humility of Mary. St. Thomas Aquinas would say “Humilitas, vertitas.” Humility is truth. **At the moment of the Annunciation, the Virgin states “I am the handmaid Lord, let it be done according to your word.” Mary response is heroic, courageous and humble.** She sees herself at the service of something much bigger than herself. St. Bernard of Clairvaux reflected on the moment and would state that it was the longest moment of human history as creation waited for Mary’s response. In her response is the implication of a woman who sees her herself in need of a savior and reliant on God’s constant, consistent and covenantal love.

Greed becomes absurd due to the radical generosity of God. Lust is combated by chastity. In fact, every deadly vice is combated and demonstrated as un-inspired by the moment of the Incarnation.

Colossians 1:16-17 states that “For in Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” The awesomeness of God

and his passionate love for humanity could have been manifested in so many ways. God chose to begin his conquering of sin, death and suffering through the cooperative act of a virgin and in her silent and vulnerable tabernacle of a womb.

The ultimate icon of meekness is the Incarnation. Through the conceived baby who was born, raised, worked with St. Joseph, was obedient to his mother and father, preached, healed, delivered from demons, established the Eucharistic sacrifice, suffered, outpoured his body and blood, offered Himself, died, was resurrected, ascended and outpoured the Holy Spirit always stands in front of us like the image of Divine Mercy. He constantly has one hand pointing to himself and the other hand in blessing.

Two thousand years ago the world was changed by the courage and meekness of martyrs and saints who stood with integrity in the face of adversity. Many things have changed since then. But something has remained unchanged. The world needs saints and martyrs. **The affirmation and building of the Culture of Life includes a strategic and familiar approach but as importantly it requires the Christian becoming what they have been redeemed to be: a saint.**