

# LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

## Life in Christ - Part 2: Pride - Good For You?

Last week, we began our discussion of virtues and vices. As I mentioned at that time, we will first focus on vices in order to help us make our way through Lent (Lent starts on March 6) and strive to give up the vices which may make us stumble into sin. As mentioned last week, the vices are linked to the Capital Sins, which are pride, envy, wrath, avarice, lust, gluttony, and sloth. [cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, 1866] We begin our discussion of the Capital Sins with an examination of the sin of pride.

Pride is perhaps the most confusing of the Capital Sins. The reason it confuses us is that we often use the word pride to express a positive emotion. For example, one might say, "She was proud that she had earned the Nobel Peace Prize." Who would deny that such pride is not only expected, but also deserved? When a father says to his daughter, "I'm proud of you," wouldn't we say that such pride is also positive? However, we also use the word pride in a negative context. For example, "His pride kept him from apologizing for his boorish behavior." So when is pride a good thing and when is it sinful?

Perhaps the best answer to that question is that the difference between good pride and sinful pride is how it relates to the virtue of humility. A good definition of humility is understanding who we are and who we are not. When pride encourages our self-worth and acknowledges our place in the world, it would be a good thing. Good pride works *with* humility. When pride exalts us above another, even if just in our own minds, we have entered into sinful pride. Sinful pride works *against* the virtue of humility. The sin of pride alters our relationship with others and perhaps even with God.

Jesus commanded us to love one another *as* ourselves. [MK 12:31] Through sinful pride we

elevate ourselves *above* the other instead. Therefore, the sin of pride is a sin against love. As mentioned above, it is also a sin against humility. Sinful pride is a distortion of the true picture of ourselves. On this point, St. Augustine wrote in *The City of God*, "It is thus that pride in its perversity apes God. It abhors equality with other men under Him; but, instead of His rule, it seeks to impose a rule of its own upon its equals." [De Civ. Dei xiv, 13; xix, 12]

Severely disordered pride can even make us believe that we are better than God. Many theologians, including St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, would say that it was through pride that the disobedience of Adam and Eve led to our Original Sin. Adam and Eve were aiming above their rightful place. They thought they might be able to be equal with God. As mentioned above, pride is sin against humility, which is knowing who we are and who we are not. Neither Adam nor Eve nor we are equal to God.

In the Book of Sirach, we read, "The first stage of pride is to desert the Lord and to turn one's heart away from one's Maker. Since the first stage of pride is sin, whoever clings to it will pour forth filth." [Sir 10:12-13] From this passage, St. Thomas Aquinas extrapolates that pride is not only the first sin, but the sin that leads to all other sin, since all sin is a turning away from God. [*Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q. 84, a. 2] Perhaps we might even say that pride is the "Capital" of all Capital Sins.

Next week, we will look at envy, another of the Capital Sins, which finds its root in pride.

