Humility: The mother of all virtues

Every time we visited relatives, my mother would admonish us, “Know your place!” adding, “Don’t be a showoff, practice humility!”

St. Gregory the Great and St. Augustine considered humility the pivotal virtue upon which all other virtues depend.

In the book “Sacred Signs,” Father Romano Guardini points us to the ultimate place humility should possess in our hearts: “When a man feels proud, he stands erect, draws himself to his full height, throws back his head and shoulders and says with every part of his body, I am bigger and more important than you.

“But when he is humble, he feels his littleness, and lowers his head and shrinks into himself. He abases himself. … But when does our littleness so come home to us as when we stand in God’s presence? He is the great God who is today and yesterday. …

“To appear less presumptuous, to be little and low as we feel, we sink to our knees and thus sacrifice half our height, and to satisfy our hearts still further we bow our heads and diminished stature speaks to God and says, Thou art the great God, I am nothing.”

Simply put, we know our place in acknowledging that without God we are nothing.

Humility is at the very heart of docility: an essential quality of prudence.

Philosopher Josef Pieper observes in the book “The Four Cardinal Virtues”: “No man is altogether self-sufficient in matters of prudence; without ‘docililtas’ there is no perfect prudence. … (‘Docilitas’) recognizes the true variety of things and situations to be experienced and does not cage itself in any presumption of deceptive knowledge.

“What is meant is the ability to take advice, sprung not from any vague ‘modesty,’ but simply from the desire for real understanding (which, however, necessarily includes genuine humility).”

Simply put, we are to be humble seekers of the truth and avoid being know-it-alls.

The mottos, “One nation under God” and “In God we trust,” echo through our U.S. Capitol, reminding us that humble faith in God is at the basis of being a great nation.

Simply put, humility is knowing God’s place in our success.

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