

## XV Sunday after Pentecost - Magnanimity

*In the name of the Father...*

On account of some excellence, be it a personal quality such as virtue or an office held, honor is due to someone, conferred by an external sign of reverence bearing witness to that excellence, e.g., a bow or genuflection.<sup>1</sup> Among the goods which a man can receive, above wealth and power honor ranks first because it is given to God and is the highest reward bestowed on virtue, whence men naturally greatly seek it.<sup>2</sup>

Glory results from honor bestowed because thereby someone's excellence becomes more widely known.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, because honor and glory should follow upon true excellence, the desire for them does not, of itself, denote a sin.<sup>4</sup>

The virtue moderating the desire for honor and glory is *magnanimity*. Noting that the magnanimous man strives after great things,<sup>5</sup> Aquinas adds a qualification: *If... one was to despise honors so as not to care to do what is worthy of honor, this would be deserving of blame. Accordingly, magnanimity is about honors in the sense that a man strives to do what is deserving of honor, yet not to think much of the honor accorded by man.*<sup>6</sup>

Thus the pagan and Christian perceptions of honor, glory and *magnanimity* differ. For Aristotle, the magnanimous man was the ideal, seeking and knowing his worth. For the Christian - on account of sin and especially Original Sin – *magnanimity* must be tempered with *humility*. The Catholic Encyclopedia summarizes: *Honor, being the due homage paid to worth... may be lawfully sought for, but inasmuch as all worth is from God, and man of himself has nothing but sin, it must be referred to God and sought only for His sake or for the good of one's fellow-men. Honors, like riches, are dangerous gifts, and it is praiseworthy to renounce them out of love for Him who for our sakes was poor and despised.*<sup>7</sup>

We can recall here Our Lord's teaching on *magnanimity*: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* The magnanimous Christian, prompted and aided by God's grace, strives after great things only that he might turn honest

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<sup>1</sup> [ST IIa IIae 103, 1, c](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Catholic Encyclopedia: Honor](#)

<sup>3</sup> [ST IIa IIae 103, 1, ad 3um](#)

<sup>4</sup> [ST IIa IIae 132, 1, c](#)

<sup>5</sup> [ST IIa IIae 129, 1, c](#)

<sup>6</sup> [ST IIa IIae 129, 1, ad 3um](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Catholic Encyclopedia: Honor](#)

men to God, eschewing any personal recognition in accordance with Our Lord's admonition: *Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be seen by them... you must not be like the hypocrites.*<sup>8</sup>

A man, then, may strive inordinately after recognition, after honor and glory. St Paul writes: *Let us not become desirous of vainglory.*<sup>9</sup> Aquinas notes that, a vice opposed to *magnanimity*, glory can be sought vainly in three ways: first, in something unworthy, e.g., in some doubtful or specious concern;<sup>10</sup> secondly, in undiscerning judgement, e.g., from a sycophant or someone enslaved to the zeitgeist; thirdly, when it is not referred either to God or the genuine good of neighbor.<sup>11</sup>

Honor being very desirable, the Catholic Encyclopedia notes that vainglory is a capital vice... *because it is prolific of other sins, viz., disobedience, boastfulness, hypocrisy, contentiousness, discord and a presumptuous love of pernicious novelties in moral and religious doctrine.*<sup>12</sup>

If not a Sunday, today we would commemorate the Imprinting of the Stigmata in St Francis of Assisi. As a young man, Francis succumbed to vainglory: he dreamed of being a knight and winning glory in battle. En route to war, Francis was troubled by a voice in his sleep: *Francis, who can do more for you, the lord or his servant, a rich man or a beggar?* Francis responded that a lord and a rich man could do more. The voice asked: *Then why are you serving the servant?*

To his father's annoyance and the taunts of the townspeople, Francis returned to Assisi and sought solitude in a much-neglected church dedicated to Sts Cosmas and Damian, known locally as San Damiano. Before a large Byzantine crucifix, he contemplated the God become man and crucified, who conquered the whole world not by the sword but the word, and not for any passing ideal but for the eternal truth. St Paul writes: *[L]et this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause, God has exalted him.*<sup>13</sup>

Recognizing that here was true excellence – the greatest *magnanimity* and the profoundest *humility* – Francis hereon sought glory only in following the Lord according to St Paul's words: *God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me and I to*

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<sup>8</sup> [Mt 6:1, 5](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Gal 5:25](#)

<sup>10</sup> e.g., Climate change, Darwinian evolution, ...

<sup>11</sup> [ST IIa IIae 132, 1, c](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Catholic Encyclopedia: Glory](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Phil 2:5-9](#)

*the world*.<sup>14</sup> Embracing *humility*, Francis did not relinquish *magnanimity*: renouncing his earthly father, he would be about his heavenly father's business.<sup>15</sup>

Francis was a man of *peace* and *mercy*, but not the hollowed-out notions in vogue today. He knew that true peace is established only by bringing all into... *obedience to the faith... bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ*.<sup>16</sup> The Assisian Francis was *not ashamed of the gospel*:<sup>17</sup> not for him was conversion of the gentiles solemn nonsense. Not a man of learning, Francis could identify with a chastened St Paul: *For Christ [sent] me ... to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power*.<sup>18</sup>

Accompanying the fifth crusade and desirous to bring peace between the warring Christian and Muslim armies, inspired by Our Lord's teaching on *magnanimity*, prompted and aided by God's grace, Francis ventured into the Egyptian desert and into the Muslim camp seeking not dialog and discernment, but nothing short of the Sultan's conversion to Christianity. Refusing to engage in debate, the Muslim Imams demanded Francis' head: entranced by Francis' preaching, the Sultan refused. To demonstrate the veracity of the gospel and the falsity of Islam, Francis offered to the Imams the ultimate trial: he and they would walk through fire. Upon their refusal – indeed one of the Sultan's most trusted Imams quietly slipped out of the tent – Francis ventured to walk through fire alone. Perhaps fearing a revolt, now the Sultan refused this offer characteristic of the man who - *no presumptuous lover of pernicious novelties* - had complete confidence in the gospel's power to effect conversion if only it was preached unmitigated.

Toward the end of his life, suffering constantly, Francis' desire to... *glory in cross of Christ and be crucified to the world* came to a climax on Mount Laverna. Here God afforded him both the consoling vision of a Seraph and – for the first time in history - the stigmata, Christ's painful crucifixion wounds in his hands, feet and side. The two were not unconnected. Created simply to love and adore the trinitarian God, the Seraphs by nature are the closest to the charity which is God.<sup>19</sup> And by the stigmata, God imprinted in Francis the external signs of honor bearing witness to his true excellence within and worthy of glory, that all-consuming *charity* which burned more fiercely in the once vainglorious Francis than any earthly fire he magnanimously offered to walk through to bring the Muslims to love and adore

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<sup>14</sup> [Gal 6:14](#)

<sup>15</sup> C.f., [Lk 2:49](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Rom 1:5](#); [16:26](#); [2 Cor 10:5](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Rom 1:16](#)

<sup>18</sup> [1 Cor 1:17-18](#)

<sup>19</sup> [1 Jn 4:8](#)

this trinitarian God... this poor, despised, glorious, magnanimous Incarnate God who... *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant... [who] humbled himself, becoming obedient unto the death of the cross. For which cause, God has exalted him.*

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