

*“The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord;
the heart has withdrawn from its Maker.”*
Ecclesiasticus 10:12.

There is a proper place for human pride, **and** there is a kind of pride which is very unattractive. The Greeks had a word for it, the unattractive sort, and the word is **Hubris** meaning the insolence which leads to a pride which is inappropriate and unjustifiable and ugly to see. Sadly, humanity has a tendency to *hubris*, which is universal, common to all classes of society, to all religions and every political divide.

There are two ways of thinking about pride. On the one hand, we can and should have a proper pride in harnessing our God-given abilities to make good things happen for us and for other people. There is a proper pride in achievement and a place for personal satisfaction for work well done or difficulties overcome. Such pride properly recognises the role of others in our achievement and acknowledges the Creator as the source of it all.

But pride is also a monster, creating individuals who are hell-bent on self-aggrandisement, conspicuous displays of wealth or power, tending towards a destruction of the concept of the absolute goodness of God as the startling standard to reach out for. As the writer of Ecclesiasticus puts it, for the person with this kind of insufferable pride, **the heart has withdrawn from its Maker**.

What a chilling and catastrophic scenario that phrase paints of a prideful person. What a dreadful notion - for a human heart to withdraw from its maker. It speaks of an inner self-inflicted isolation from the source of life. It sounds like a deliberate acceptance of evil, a choosing to turn away from God, not to turn away from our sins. It is like a wounded person walking out of a hospital with the wound still gaping wide apart, walking away from the source of healing.

This kind of pride poses itself as life-enhancing but is in reality, a self-destructive urge. There are many ways in which hubris can insinuate itself into our daily lives, but the root seems to be a self-centred approach to life. The wrongful pride which we all detest in other people is so self-centred that it has forgotten how others have helped in our achievements. It forgets that we all needed to start somewhere. We all needed a leg-up from time to time. We all relied on other people for some aspect of our success.

Pride teaches us to forget these people and these truths and, lying all the way, apports all success to the self, squeezing out any consideration of other people, and even squeezing out consideration of who it is that made us and gave us this planet and breathed life into our nostrils.

The parable told by Jesus in today's reading from Luke's Gospel puts pride in its proper context. If invited to a banquet, avoid the temptation to promote your self-importance by sitting down in the best seats. When the Host sees you, he will make his own assessment of your importance and ask you to move to a lower place. In this manner, you will be humiliating yourself by your own pride.

For us Christians, the situation is expressed clearly in many other teachings of Jesus. What it boils down to is that we are all flawed, and we all need the grace and love of God to raise our lives from the lower reaches to which we have drifted.

None of us, when faced with the eternal shining goodness of God, can claim to be proud of ourselves. When we consider the beauty and selfless love of Jesus Christ, our claims to pride fall away, and we wish we had never thought the thoughts, let alone spoken the words.

At the heart of our faith, as Christians, is that we bring nothing to defray the cost of our flawed and messy lives. That cost, we unashamedly claim, is fully paid for by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. As the words of the fine hymn of Augustus Toplady teach us:

“Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.”

Or as Isaac Watts great hymn teaches us:

“When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.”