

I. PRIDE & HUMILITY

The souls on Mount Purgatory in Dante's *Divine Comedy* do various forms of penance for their sins in ways that reflect both the nature of their sins and the way to salvation from those sins. The proud bear heavy rocks on their backs which simultaneously weigh them down (as pride weighs us down) and force them to look at the earth from which they came. This reveals the quintessential truth about our lives: we are "of the earth" and not the creators of good and evil, right and wrong. To learn humility is to learn to live in reality. In this study guide, be particularly attentive to how you can learn to live in reality, forsake pride, and humble yourself.

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Read Matthew 5:3, 2 Corinthians 8:9, Proverbs 16:18-19 and CCC 2546. What does it mean to be "poor in spirit"? How does this attitude contrast with pride? How does Jesus model this? How can we imitate that in practical ways?
2. Read CCC 2547. Can the proud truly abandon themselves to "the providence of the Father"? Why or why not?
3. Read CCC 2631. How can pride stand in the way of forgiveness, prayer, and right worship?
4. Read Philippians 2:1-11. What qualities does Paul encourage us to have? How does he base this command on Jesus Christ? What did Jesus do, according to Paul?
5. Read Luke 1:46-55. How does Mary model humility? What are some of the things Mary says that our culture does not tend to identify as "humble" statements? How does this illuminate the differences between the biblical understanding of humility and our cultural notions of it?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Fr. Barron mentions the famous "mystery clause" from the Supreme Court's "Casey Decision," which declares: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." How does this understanding of freedom differ from a Christian understanding? What are some of the consequences of this understanding of freedom?
2. Dante puts pride at the bottom of Mount Purgatory as the heaviest and deadliest sin to be purged. Have you ever thought of pride as the worst sin, or do you tend to think other sins are worse? Why is pride the worst sin? How have you seen pride at work in your life?
3. Dante represents the penance for pride as carrying heavy boulders on the back. Have you had to suffer for pride? What was it like? Has God brought healing out of that suffering? What was that like?
4. Humility is described variously as being earthy," or living in truth, or being self-forgetful. How and when have you experienced these things? Have you ever known a humble person? What was he or she like?
5. A good first step toward cultivating the virtue of humility is to purposely take the lower place and not merely the equal place to somebody else. Aristotle uses the image of bending the stick backward, not merely bending it straight. Have you ever put yourself lower than a competitor? Is there somebody in your life to whom you need to cede the higher place? What concrete step could you take to do that?