Introduction: A Temptation More Relevant Than Ever

We live in the age of visibility. Never before has it been so easy to present ourselves to the world. Social media, image culture, the obsession with followers, likes, constant approval, and the need to be recognized have turned the pursuit of admiration into one of the great temptations of our time.

Many men and women spend a large part of their lives trying to build an admirable image. They want to be respected, valued, applauded, and recognized. Even within religious circles there exists the danger of seeking admiration under the appearance of virtue.

Yet more than six hundred years ago, one of the most important spiritual books in Christian history issued a serious warning about this problem.

It is *The Imitation of Christ*, a work that for centuries was considered, after the Bible, the most widely read spiritual book in the Catholic world.

Its pages contain profound teaching on humility and denounce with extraordinary clarity the danger of living in search of the approval of others.

What is remarkable is that its words seem to have been written for our own age.

What Is *The Imitation of Christ*?

The Imitation of Christ was most likely written by Thomas à Kempis between the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

It emerged from the spiritual movement known as the *Devotio Moderna*, which sought a more interior, simple, and Christ-centered Christian life.

Its message is clear:

It is not enough to know the faith.

It is not enough to speak about God.

It is not enough to appear holy.

One must truly become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The work repeatedly insists that the Christian must abandon the pursuit of human glory in order to seek only the glory of God.

Among its best-known teachings we find this warning:

> *"Do not concern yourself greatly with who is for you or against you; strive only that God may be with you in everything you do."*

And also:

> *"What profit is there in the esteem of men when your conscience accuses you before God?"*

These words strike directly at one of the most common spiritual illnesses of all times: vainglory.

The Need to Be Admired: A Deeply Human Passion

We all desire to be loved.

That is natural.

God created us for communion with others.

However, there is a tremendous difference between wanting to be loved and wanting to be

admired.

Love seeks relationship.

Admiration seeks exaltation.

Love seeks self-giving.

Admiration seeks to feed the ego.

The person who lives to be admired eventually turns others into spectators of his own importance.

He no longer acts because something is good.

He acts because he wants to be seen.

He no longer seeks truth.

He seeks applause.

He no longer seeks to please God.

He seeks to impress men.

And here begins an extremely dangerous spiritual process.

Vainglory: A Forgotten Sin

The ancient spiritual masters frequently spoke about vainglory.

Today it is scarcely mentioned.

Yet for the Desert Fathers it was one of the most dangerous temptations.

Evagrius Ponticus considered it one of the great vices that attack the soul.

Saint John Cassian taught that even good works can become nourishment for vanity.

A person may fast for God.

Or he may fast so that others will consider him holy.

He may give alms out of charity.

Or he may do so in order to be admired.

He may pray to unite himself with Christ.

Or he may pray so that others will regard him as pious.

Outwardly both actions appear identical.

But inwardly they are completely different.

That is why vainglory is so difficult to detect.

It hides behind virtues.

Jesus Christ Denounced This Attitude Sternly

Our Lord repeatedly spoke against those who sought human recognition.

In the Gospel we find extremely strong words:

> *"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men in order to be seen by them; otherwise you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 6:1).*

Later He adds:

> *“When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Mt 6:3).*

And regarding prayer:

> *“When you pray, go into your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret” (Mt 6:6).*

The issue is not whether the works are good.

The issue is why we do them.

Jesus directs our attention to intention.

Are we seeking God?

Or are we seeking our own glory?

Social Media and the New Factory of Vanity

Although vainglory has always existed, our age has provided it with extraordinarily powerful tools.

Social media has transformed admiration into a kind of currency.

Followers.

Views.

Likes.

Comments.

Shares.

Everything seems designed to measure our worth according to the attention we receive.

Naturally, these tools are not evil in themselves.

They can be used to evangelize, teach, and spread goodness.

But they can also become a spiritual trap.

Even religious content can end up feeding the ego.

There is a danger that a person may publish content about God while thinking only about himself.

He may speak about humility while seeking recognition.

He may preach the Gospel while pursuing fame.

He may quote the saints while cultivating his own image.

Technology has multiplied opportunities to do good.

But it has also multiplied opportunities to seek human glory.

The Spiritual Danger of Living for the Opinions of Others

When the admiration of others becomes a necessity, the soul loses its freedom.

The person no longer acts according to truth.

He acts according to the expectations of others.

He begins to depend emotionally upon approval.

A compliment lifts him up.

A criticism destroys him.

A favorable comment gives him peace.

A negative observation robs him of sleep.

Little by little he ceases to live before God and begins to live before an audience.

Then an invisible slavery appears.

The slavery of public opinion.

The Imitation of Christ constantly insists that the Christian must learn to remain indifferent both to praise and to unjust criticism.

Not because other people do not matter.

But because the only gaze that ultimately matters is God’s.

The Example of the Saints

The saints understood this truth in a radical way.

Saint Francis of Assisi said that a man is worth before God exactly what he is worth—and no more.

Praise does not increase our holiness.

Criticism does not diminish it.

Saint Teresa of Ávila deeply distrusted the pursuit of honors.

Saint John of the Cross taught that the soul should desire to pass unnoticed in order to grow in union with God.

And Saint Philip Neri performed seemingly ridiculous acts to combat any temptation toward pride.

All of them understood that spiritual fame can be just as dangerous as worldly fame.

Religious Pride: The Most Difficult Enemy to Defeat

There exists a particularly dangerous form of the desire for admiration.

Religious pride.

It is the desire to be regarded as holy.

Virtuous.

Pious.

Orthodox.

Exemplary.

It is an especially common temptation among those who take their faith seriously.

Because the more a person grows in virtue, the more the temptation may arise to contemplate himself.

The devil does not always try to pull us away from good works.

Sometimes he tries to make us fall in love with them.

To stop looking at Christ and start looking at ourselves.

That is why the spiritual masters insisted that humility must grow at the same pace as the spiritual life.

Christian Humility Does Not Mean Despising Yourself

At this point it is important to clarify something.

Christian humility does not mean thinking that you are worthless.

It does not mean hating yourself.

It does not mean denying the talents you have received.

Humility means recognizing the truth.

Recognizing that every good thing comes from God.

Recognizing that we depend entirely upon Him.

Recognizing our limitations without despairing.

And recognizing our gifts without claiming ownership of them.

A humble person can accept praise.

But he does not live on it.

He can receive recognition.

But he does not need it in order to feel valuable.

His identity is anchored in something far deeper:

He knows that he is a son or daughter of God.

How to Fight the Desire to Be Admired

1. Examine Your Intentions

Before acting, it is helpful to ask:

Why am I doing this?

Would I still do it if no one ever knew?

This question often reveals a great deal.

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2. Practice Hidden Works

Jesus insisted on works done in secret.

Praying in silence.

Helping without announcing it.

Giving without publicizing it.

Serving without expecting gratitude.

Hidden works strengthen the soul against vanity.

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3. Accept Humiliations with Serenity

No one enjoys being corrected or misunderstood.

But such situations can become a school of humility.

This does not mean seeking humiliations artificially.

It means making use of those that God permits.

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4. Frequently Meditate on the Passion of Christ

Christ is the great antidote to vanity.

The King of the universe accepted rejection.

The Creator endured mockery.

Truth itself was despised.

Contemplation of the Cross destroys many illusions of greatness.

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5. Remember the Fleeting Nature of Human Glory

Today they applaud you.

Tomorrow they forget you.

Today you are admired.

Tomorrow you are criticized.

Human fame is extraordinarily unstable.

That is why *The Imitation of Christ* constantly reminds us of the brevity of life and the futility of earthly honors.

True Greatness According to the Gospel

The world says:

“Seek to stand out.”

Christ says:

> *“If anyone would be first, he must be the servant of all” (Mk 9:35).*

The world says:

“Build your personal brand.”

Christ says:

> *“Learn from me; for I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29).*

The world says:

“Make sure everyone talks about you.”

Christ says:

> *“Your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:4).*

Two completely different logics.

Two completely opposite paths.

Conclusion: Living Before the Eyes of God

The great teaching of *The Imitation of Christ* remains revolutionary in the twenty-first century.

We were not created to collect admirers.

We were not created to build a perfect reputation.

We were not created to live dependent upon the approval of others.

We were created to know, love, and serve God.

When a person understands this, he experiences immense freedom.

He no longer needs to constantly prove his worth.

He no longer lives enslaved to the opinions of others.

He no longer seeks to be the center.

He seeks for Christ to occupy the center.

And then he discovers a profoundly Christian paradox: those who stop seeking their own glory are precisely those who begin to reflect the glory of God.

True holiness does not consist in being admired by men, but in being pleasing to God. And when the day of judgment arrives, it will not matter how many people applauded us, how many followers we had, or how many compliments we received. The only thing that will matter is hearing those words that every Christian should desire above every human recognition:

> *"Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord" (Mt 25:23).*

That approval is worth infinitely more than all the applause in the world combined.