The **Litany of Humility** is one of the most challenging, profound, and transformative prayers in all of Catholic spirituality. It is not merely a collection of pious phrases. It is a true school of spiritual combat against pride, disordered self-love, and vanity. At first glance, it may seem excessive or even impossible to pray sincerely. Yet the deeper one enters into it, the more one discovers that it is a genuine path toward spiritual freedom.

We live in an age that has turned the ego into a religion.

Social media rewards self-display.

Advertising constantly encourages us to stand out.

Contemporary culture identifies success with being admired, recognized, and applauded.

Everything seems to tell us:

"Make sure everyone notices you."

Yet Christ teaches exactly the opposite.

> *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*
> *(Luke 14:11)*

This single sentence summarizes the entire logic of the Gospel.

Humility is not simply one virtue among many others. It is the foundation upon which all the other virtues rest. Without humility there can be no true faith, authentic charity, obedience, or perseverance.

For this very reason, one of the greatest treasures of Catholic spirituality is the **Litany of Humility**, a prayer capable of laying the heart bare and revealing where pride still reigns.

It is not a comfortable prayer.

It was not written to make us feel good.

It was written to make us holy.

What Exactly Is the Litany of Humility?

The Litany of Humility is a prayer composed at the beginning of the twentieth century by **Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val (1865–1930)**, Secretary of State during the pontificate of **Saint Pius X**.

Paradoxically, Merry del Val was one of the most influential men in the world.

He possessed power.

Prestige.

Influence.

And yet he prayed every day not to desire any of those things.

His prayer was so profound that it quickly spread through monasteries, seminaries, and religious communities, eventually becoming one of the best-known prayers of the Church.

Today it continues to be prayed throughout the world.

Not because it is pleasant.

But because it works.

A Prayer That Goes Against Our Fallen Nature

After Original Sin, something dramatic happened.

Humanity stopped looking first toward God and began looking toward itself.

Pride was born in the human heart.

That is why the first sin of humanity was not simply eating a forbidden fruit.

It was wanting to become like God.

> *"You will be like gods."*
> *(Genesis 3:5)*

Ever since then, each of us carries within a constant inclination to seek:

- recognition;
- admiration;
- approval;
- prestige;
- importance;
- success;
- superiority.

Spiritual tradition calls this **disordered self-love**.

The Litany strikes precisely at this spiritual disease.

Who Wrote This Prayer?

Its author was **Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val**, born in London to a Spanish family.

He was one of Saint Pius X's closest collaborators.

Yet, far from seeking honors, he chose to live a deeply spiritual life marked by humility.

It is said that he prayed this litany every single day.

Not in order to appear humble.

But in order truly to become humble.

His example demonstrates that humility does not consist in having few talents.

Rather, it consists in attributing everything to God.

What Does Humility Really Mean?

There is a widespread misunderstanding about this virtue.

Many people believe that being humble means thinking poorly of oneself.

That is not humility.

It may even be a lack of healthy self-esteem or a distorted perception of reality.

Saint Thomas Aquinas explains that humility consists in living according to the truth.

And the truth is twofold:

We are capable of accomplishing great things…

…but everything we are has been received.

As Saint Paul writes:

> *"What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as though you had not received it?"*
> *(1 Corinthians 4:7)*

Humility does not deny our gifts.

It acknowledges the Giver.

A Prayer That Makes Us Uncomfortable… Because It Reveals Our Hearts

Many Christians are surprised the first time they read phrases such as:

“From the desire of being esteemed, deliver me, Jesus.”

“From the desire of being loved…”

“From the desire of being praised…”

“From the desire of being preferred…”

“From the desire of being consulted…”

“From the desire of being approved…”

Our first reaction is often:

“How can I possibly pray for that?”

Because we suddenly realize that these are precisely the things we spend our lives seeking.

And that is where conversion begins.

The Great Enemy: Pride

All the Fathers of the Church agree on one point.

Pride is the root of nearly every sin.

Saint Augustine wrote:

> *“It was pride that changed angels into devils; humility makes men into angels.”*

Pride can even hide behind actions that appear religious.

We may pray…

…in order to appear devout.

We may help others…

…in order to receive recognition.

We may evangelize…

…in order to feel superior.

The Litany tears away these masks.

Analyzing Each Petition

“From the desire of being esteemed”

This does not mean rejecting affection.

It means ceasing to depend on it.

A person who constantly needs to be esteemed eventually becomes a slave to the opinions of others.

Christ lived in complete freedom.

One day the crowds acclaimed Him.

Only a few days later they cried out:

“Crucify Him!”

Yet He remained the same.

“From the desire of being loved”

We all need love.

But only God can fully satisfy the human heart.

When we make our happiness depend upon human love, we end up demanding too much from other people.

The Litany teaches us to rest first in the love of God.

“From the desire of being praised”

Praise can be a good thing.

Constantly seeking it is not.

Jesus warned:

> *“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” (John 5:44)*

“From the fear of being humiliated”

This petition is especially difficult.

No one likes humiliation.

Yet Christ freely embraced the Cross.

He was insulted.

Spat upon.

Crowned with thorns.

Abandoned.

And it was precisely there that He revealed true greatness.

The Second Part: Desiring the Good of Others

The second half of the Litany is even more revolutionary.

It is not enough simply to stop seeking honors for ourselves.

We must also rejoice when others receive them.

That is why we pray:

“That others may be loved more than I…”

“More highly esteemed…”

“Praised more…”

“Chosen more…”

“Become holier than I…”

These petitions strike at the very root of envy.

Does This Mean Despising Yourself?

Not at all.

The Church has never taught such a thing.

Christian humility does not consist in thinking:

“I am worthless.”

Rather, it consists in thinking:

“Everything good in me belongs to God.”

That is an enormous difference.

Christ: The Perfect Model

The entire prayer is inspired by Christ.

Saint Paul writes:

> *“Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant…”*
> *(Philippians 2:5–7)*

Here we find the very heart of Christian humility.

God became a servant.

The King washed feet.

The Creator obeyed.

The Lord died for His own creatures.

Humility According to the Saints

The saints never ceased speaking about this virtue.

Saint Teresa of Ávila

“Humility is walking in truth.”

It does not consist in putting oneself down.

It consists in seeing oneself as God sees us.

Saint Benedict

In his Rule, he devotes an entire chapter to the twelve degrees of humility.

For him, the entire monastic life is built upon this virtue.

Saint Francis of Assisi

He considered himself the least of all.

Not out of false modesty.

But because he constantly contemplated the greatness of God.

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus

She discovered that true humility consists in allowing oneself to be loved by God with complete trust.

Humility in a Society Obsessed with Image

Never has it been more necessary to pray this litany.

We live surrounded by comparisons.

Number of followers.

Likes.

Professional success.

Appearance.

Popularity.

All of these feed the ego.

The Litany reminds us that our identity does not depend upon the approval of the world.

It depends solely on being children of God.

Why Is It So Difficult to Pray It?

Because every single phrase strikes directly at our pride.

We would like to be humble…

…provided no one contradicts us.

We would like to serve…

…provided people thank us.

We would like to obey…

…provided we agree with what is asked of us.

The Litany reveals how much conversion still remains to be accomplished.

True Interior Freedom

The humble person possesses immense freedom.

He does not need to impress anyone.

He does not need to compete.

He does not need to pretend.

He does not need to prove his worth constantly.

His heart rests in God.

As the Psalmist says:

> *“O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor are my eyes haughty; I do not*

> *concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me." (Psalm 131:1)*

Practical Applications for Daily Life

The Litany of Humility is not intended only for priests, religious, or contemplative souls.

It is profoundly relevant for every baptized Christian living in the world today.

We can live it when:

- we accept correction without reacting with anger;
- we allow another person to receive credit for shared work;
- we avoid constantly speaking about ourselves;
- we listen before responding;
- we serve without expecting gratitude;
- we acknowledge our mistakes with simplicity;
- we ask for forgiveness without making excuses;
- we thank God for the gifts of others instead of falling into envy;
- we perform acts of charity discreetly, without needing to publicize them;
- we offer up daily humiliations out of love for Christ.

Each of these situations becomes a concrete exercise in humility.

Should Everyone Pray It?

Yes, though with the right interior attitude.

It is not about seeking artificial humiliations.

Nor about allowing injustice or abuse.

Nor about losing one's dignity.

It is about asking God for a heart free from the domination of pride.

Many spiritual directors recommend praying it slowly, pausing especially at the phrases that provoke the greatest resistance.

Precisely there is often the place where God wishes to work most deeply.

Mary: The Teacher of Humility

After Christ, no one embodies this virtue more perfectly than the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the **Magnificat**, she proclaims:

> *"For He has looked upon the humility of His servant."*

Mary never sought prominence.

Her entire life consisted in pointing toward Christ.

At the wedding at Cana, she speaks a phrase that summarizes her entire spirituality:

> *"Do whatever He tells you."*
> *(John 2:5)*

True humility always leads to Jesus and never to oneself.

A Remedy for Today’s Church

The Church needs great preachers, good theologians, excellent catechists, and holy pastors. But above all, it needs humble Christians.

Many divisions are born from pride.

Many parish conflicts arise from the desire to impose one’s own opinion.

Many wounds within communities come from the search for power, recognition, or prestige.

The Litany of Humility acts as a permanent examination of conscience. It reminds us that the true disciple does not compete for the first place, but seeks the last place in order to serve with joy. As the Lord Himself taught:

> *“Whoever would be first among you must be your servant.” (Matthew 20:27)*

The renewal of the Church will not come only through better structures or pastoral strategies, but through converted hearts that live the Gospel of humility.

Conclusion: The Prayer That Can Change a Life

The Litany of Humility does not promise success, prestige, or recognition. It promises something infinitely greater: the freedom of the children of God.

Those who pray it with perseverance gradually discover that they no longer need to live dependent on applause, approval, or the judgment of others. They learn to find their security in Christ, the only one who fully knows the human heart and whose love does not depend on our successes or failures.

It is not an easy path. Each invocation is a call to die to the old self so that the new man spoken of by Saint Paul may be born. However, it is precisely this death to the ego that

allows true joy to flourish. The history of the Church shows that the greatest saints were not those who sought the first place, but those who accepted to disappear so that Christ might shine.

As **Saint John the Baptist** wrote, in a phrase that summarizes the spirit of this litany:

> ***"He must increase, and I must decrease."*** *(John 3:30)*

This is the secret of all holiness.

In a world that constantly cries out *"look at me"*, the Litany of Humility teaches us to say with serenity: **"Lord, may it be You who is seen in me."**

And when that prayer ceases to be merely words and becomes a way of life, pride begins to lose ground, peace fills the soul, and the Christian discovers that true greatness does not consist in being admired by men, but in being found faithful by God. There true freedom begins, there true charity blossoms, and there the sure path toward holiness is born.