



A Theological and Pastoral Reflection for Today's Christian

The spiritual life is, in essence, the journey of union with God. It is an interior pilgrimage that begins at Baptism and is called to culminate in holiness. Yet those who seriously try to live their faith soon discover a troubling reality: progressing spiritually is far more difficult than it appears.

Many Christians pray, attend Mass, receive the sacraments, and even perform works of charity, yet they feel stuck. They wonder why they do not experience deeper growth, why they repeatedly fall into the same faults, or why their relationship with God seems not to advance.

The question is fundamental: what most prevents progress in the spiritual life?

The answer may seem simple, but it contains profound theological depth: what most prevents progress in the spiritual life is a disordered attachment to oneself. In other words: pride.

All other obstacles arise, in one way or another, from this root.

The Great Hidden Enemy

When we think about obstacles in the spiritual life, we usually point to external factors: the modern world, temptations, lack of time, bad influences, secularization, or even personal difficulties.

However, the spiritual tradition of the Church has always taught that the principal enemy is found within us.

The Desert Fathers, the great spiritual masters of East and West, Saint Benedict, Saint Bernard, Thomas Aquinas, Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and Francis de Sales all agree on the same teaching: the greatest obstacle to God's action in the soul is disordered self-love.

This is not about healthy self-esteem or legitimate self-care. The problem arises when man places himself at the center of everything.



Pride causes us to seek our own will before God's will.

It makes us want to serve God, but according to our own conditions.

It leads us to pray when we feel like it.

To obey when we agree.

To practice virtue as long as it does not cost us too much.

Ultimately, pride attempts to make God the servant of our desires.

The Origin of the Problem: A Wound That Comes from Original Sin

To understand this reality, we must return to Genesis.

The serpent's first temptation was precisely an invitation to pride:

┆ *"You will be like gods" (Gen 3:5).*

Original sin was not simply about eating a forbidden fruit.

It was the decision to place one's own will above the will of God.

Adam and Eve stopped trusting God and wanted to determine for themselves what was good and evil.

Since then, all humanity has carried this inclination.

Catholic theology calls this tendency "concupiscence."

Although Baptism removes original sin, an inclination toward evil remains within us, continually urging us to seek our own interests before the glory of God.



That is why the spiritual life is a constant struggle.

Not against God.

Not against others.

But against our own selfishness.

Pride: The Root of All Sins

Christian tradition considers pride to be the mother of all sins.

Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches that pride is a disorder by which a person seeks an excellence that does not properly belong to him.

It is the practical refusal to depend upon God.

For this reason, pride can hide even behind the best of works.

There can be pride in fasting.

There can be pride in prayer.

There can be pride in studying theology.

There can be pride in apostolic work.

There can even be pride in the pursuit of holiness itself.

The proud soul wants to be admired for its virtue.

It wants recognition.

It wants to be right.

It wants to stand out.



It wants control.

It wants to occupy the center.

And while the “self” occupies the center, Christ remains displaced.

The Gospel Shows Us the Contrast

Christ presents us with two opposing models.

On one side, the Pharisee.

On the other, the tax collector.

The Gospel says:

“The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men...’”

Meanwhile, the tax collector simply said:

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” (Lk 18:11-13)

Jesus concludes:

“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Lk 18:14)

This teaching is revolutionary.



Spiritual progress depends not primarily on how much we do, but on how much we allow God to act.

And God acts especially in humble souls.

Spiritual Self-Sufficiency: A Modern Illness

Our age greatly favors the growth of pride.

We live in a culture centered on the individual.

Personal autonomy is constantly exalted.

We are repeatedly told:

“Believe in yourself.”

“Live your truth.”

“Do what makes you happy.”

“Depend on no one.”

Although some of these expressions contain positive elements, when they are absolutized they end up directly conflicting with the Gospel.

The Christian faith teaches something very different:

We need God.

We depend on God.

We cannot save ourselves.

We cannot sanctify ourselves by our own strength.

We cannot overcome sin without grace.



Jesus stated this with complete clarity:

| *“Apart from me you can do nothing.” (Jn 15:5)*

This phrase should constantly echo within us.

He does not say, “You can do little.”

He does not say, “You can do less.”

He says:

“You can do nothing.”

Holiness is impossible without divine grace.

Another Great Obstacle: Spiritual Lukewarmness

From pride often emerges another terrible enemy: lukewarmness.

Lukewarmness consists in settling for a mediocre spiritual life.

It is ceasing to struggle.

It is becoming comfortable in a superficial faith.

The lukewarm person does not openly reject God.

He simply stops seeking Him with intensity.

He does the minimum.

He prays when convenient.



He goes to confession occasionally.

He attends Mass, but without true interior conversion.

Little by little, he loses fervor.

And the most dangerous thing is that he often does not even realize it.

The Book of Revelation contains one of the strongest warnings in all Scripture:

“Because you are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” (Rev 3:16)

These words may seem harsh, but they express a profound reality: God desires our whole heart.

Not a part of it.

Not the leftovers.

Not the time that remains after everything else.

Attachment to Venial Sin

Another enormous obstacle to spiritual growth is a voluntary attachment to venial sin.

Many people mistakenly believe that as long as they avoid mortal sin, everything is fine.

However, the saints teach that anyone who desires to advance toward holiness must also fight against smaller sins.

Not because they destroy sanctifying grace, but because they weaken love.

Small compromises eventually create habits.



Habits create chains.

And chains ultimately make it very difficult for God to act freely within the soul.

Saint John of the Cross used a very vivid image.

A bird tied by a thick rope cannot fly.

But neither can it fly if it is tied by a thin thread.

The issue is not the thickness of the rope.

The issue is that it remains tied.

The Distractions of the Modern World

Never has it been easier to become distracted than it is today.

Social media, constant entertainment, hyperconnectivity, and the uninterrupted consumption of information have created an environment that is not favorable to the interior life.

Many Christians say they have no time to pray.

Yet they spend hours on their phones.

They have no time to read the Gospel.

Yet they have time to scroll through hundreds of posts.

They have no time for adoration.

Yet they have time for endless entertainment.

The problem is not technology itself.

The problem is that exterior noise eventually creates tremendous interior noise.



And God usually speaks in silence.

Let us remember the experience of the prophet Elijah.

God was not in the earthquake.

Nor in the fire.

Nor in the mighty wind.

He manifested Himself in a gentle whisper (1 Kgs 19:11-13).

Souls that never make room for silence will hardly be able to hear the voice of God.

The Lack of a Sacramental Life

No authentic spiritual growth is possible without the sacraments.

Particularly without frequent Confession and the Eucharist.

Grace is not an abstract idea.

It is a supernatural reality communicated by God.

The sacraments are the ordinary channels through which Christ continues to act in His Church.

Anyone who neglects the sacraments attempts to advance spiritually without nourishment.

It is like trying to run a marathon without eating.

Sooner or later, exhaustion will prevail.

The saints were deeply sacramental men and women.

They understood that holiness is not built solely through human effort.



It is built through cooperation with grace.

Humility: The Key to All Spiritual Progress

If pride is the principal obstacle, humility is the principal solution.

Humility does not consist in despising oneself.

Nor in thinking that one is worthless.

Humility consists in living in the truth.

Recognizing who God is.

Recognizing who we are.

Recognizing our absolute dependence upon grace.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the perfect model.

When the angel announced that she would become the Mother of God, she replied:

┆ *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.” (Lk 1:38)*

She seeks no prominence.

She seeks no recognition.

She makes no demands.

She simply abandons herself to the divine will.

And precisely because of her humility, she became the greatest creature in all of history.



How to Truly Advance in the Spiritual Life

In light of the entire Catholic tradition, we can identify several concrete means:

1. Daily and Persevering Prayer

Do not wait until you feel like praying.

Prayer must become a daily priority.

2. Frequent Confession

Confession is not only for grave sins.

It is a school of humility.

3. A Deeply Lived Eucharistic Life

Christ Himself nourishes the soul.

4. Daily Examination of Conscience

It allows us to discover faults that normally go unnoticed.

5. Spiritual Reading

Sacred Scripture and the writings of the saints illuminate the path.

6. Practice Humility

Accept correction.

Acknowledge mistakes.

Ask forgiveness.



Serve without seeking recognition.

7. Fight Attachments

Ask yourself honestly:

What occupies in my heart the place that should belong to God?

Conclusion: The Real Battle Is Within Us

The history of the spiritual life is, in large measure, the history of a battle between two loves.

On one side, the love of God.

On the other, the disordered love of self.

Every spiritual obstacle ultimately leads back to this crossroads.

Pride, lukewarmness, attachments, distractions, self-sufficiency, and sin all share a common root: the attempt to place ourselves upon the throne that belongs to God alone.

The good news is that Christ does not abandon us in this struggle.

His grace is stronger than our weaknesses.

His mercy is greater than our falls.

And the more we recognize our spiritual poverty, the more room we make for Him to act.

The great saints were not perfect people. They were profoundly humble people who understood a fundamental truth: holiness begins when we stop trusting primarily in ourselves and begin trusting completely in God.

Therefore, if we truly wish to advance in the spiritual life, the decisive question is not how much we know, how much we do, or how much we appear to be.

The question is this:



Are we willing to let God take first place in our lives?

For wherever the ego retreats, grace advances. And wherever grace advances, the authentic journey toward holiness begins.