

Archbishop Smith: Photoshopping the Truth

Seldom have I met anyone pleased with their passport or driver's license photos. There is no digital altering or airbrushing of those pictures! The clear harsh reality is on full display, and often we grimace to show them. Much more to our liking are the photographs that have had removed from them any marks or shapes that we wish we did not have. They aren't real, but that doesn't stop us from presenting them to others as our "true" depictions.

Sunday's Gospel passage ([Luke 14: 1, 7-14](#)) gives us the teaching of Jesus on the necessity of humility. He observes the behaviour of guests at a banquet, noticing how some, on their own, presume to choose the places of honour, only to be humbled when the host asks them to cede their position to someone else. This is followed by the famous: "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." To paraphrase: Don't try to photoshop away the truth of who you are; it will surely backfire.

Humility is accepting reality as it is, and thus a refusal to pretend otherwise. This means the peaceful acceptance of limit and weakness, as well as a sober and grateful acknowledgement of gifts and talents. The root of the virtue of humility is the recognition that all that is good is God's gift. From this flows the peaceful acceptance of both strength and weakness, and the willingness to place both at the service of God and His people.

Pride is the clear opposite of this. It is born of a lie I tell myself, namely, that God is either non-existent or, if He does exist, that He is somehow a threat to my freedom and self-actualization. Everything devolves then to me, resulting in enormous pressure to perform, achieve, surpass and in every way to present well before others. Defect and weakness have no place in this world of illusion, so I 'photoshop' my way through life by masking reality and presenting what is not true. Worst of all, I come to see the illusion as my own self-definition, and life then becomes an endless race to perpetuate and live up to what is unreal. The author of the Book of Sirach puts it very well when he states that pride is an "evil plant" that takes root in a human heart. Its deep roots and metastasizing branches make the move from proud to humble very difficult and painful.

Jesus calls us to live humbly, which is to say authentically. He summons us to move from the photoshopped image to the passport photo, from illusion to reality. Only in this way can we have a true relationship with him and with others. Only in this way can we live rightly and peacefully. The move is not impossible with his help. Implicit in the call to humility is the summons to seek the light of his Word and grace of his mercy. Let's ask the Lord to help us see the role we are allowing pride to play in our lives, in order then to

turn to him, be healed by forgiveness, and live once more in the truth of being his beloved, just as we are.