

Just in case you didn't know, there's a deadly virus going around. It's not a new outbreak. In fact, it's documented to have been affecting people since the beginning of human civilization.

This

virus is the cause of the world's largest pandemic, affecting billions of people all over the world. The damage caused by smallpox, influenza, and even the bubonic plague, pale in comparison to the damage caused by this virus. It's actually quite fascinating how the virus affects its victim. When the virus infects a person, it multiplies and increases slowly over time. It continues until it takes over a person's brain and affects all thoughts, feelings, even actions. As the disease progresses, those who are infected never realize they are sick. They feel fine, while in actuality, they are being corrupted from the inside. They experience delusions of grandeur, become obsessed with themselves, and begin to find other people threatening. Loved ones begin to notice the development of the virus in the diseased, yet the diseased remains oblivious.

Hopefully you've figured out by now that I'm not talking about a deadly virus, but rather, a deadly vice: pride. We all learn of the dangers of pride growing up. When I was in high school, I first heard pride described as the worst of the deadly sins, because from it comes all other sins and every virtue is tainted by its presence. Even Adam and Eve ruined their beloved relationship with God because of their pride, because of their desire to "*be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:5). But that's not me, my high school-self thought. I don't suffer from pride. I always try to be good to others, I follow God's commandments, I don't care about being the center of attention, I don't think I'm above others, so I'm fine, right? Wrong.

I underestimated how imperceptible pride is. To quote C.S. Lewis, "*Pride is like bad breath: everyone else knows you have it but yourself.*" Despite being "good" in my own eyes, my every thought and action was tainted by my inflated ego. I wasn't doing things for others or for God, but rather, for myself. My relationships with my family and friends were superficial and I found it difficult to be happy when I looked at others' lives and accomplishments. I only depended on myself and refused to seek help from others. I was constantly worried about what others thought about me. I felt alienated and lost and hopeless.

Thankfully, when I turned to God in my distress, God had mercy on me and revealed to me the cause of my suffering. But I must admit I was shocked. Pride! Never would I have thought that this was the sin I suffered from. It was so hidden from me that I had never sensed it in myself. It took true prayer and self-reflection for God to show me the hidden sin in my heart.

However, once aware of my pride, I understood why I was struggling.

Pride stifles the spiritual life. According to St. Ambrose, "*All of us suffer more often than not, more or less, from vanity and pride. And nothing hinders progress in the spiritual life like these*

*passions. Wherever there is indignation, or disagreement, or dissent—if you look carefully it will turn out that the greatest part to blame for this is love of praise, and haughtiness.”*

Pride destroys contentment. It is never satisfied. According to C.S. Lewis, *“Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.”*

Worst of all, pride kills love. It prevents you from loving God and from loving all those around you. That’s because *“love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud”* (1 Cor. 13:4).

So, what’s the solution? Humility.

We learn this virtue from Our Lord Himself as we read in Phil. 2:5–8, *“Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* Humility is the opposite of pride, the medicine we take to treat our illness. In humility, we see ourselves in our true place, refuse to be obsessed with ourselves, and instead serve and care for others just like Our Lord Christ does for us.

However, the first step to humility is to realize that you are proud. Take some time to answer these questions to search your heart for the invisible and deadly vice. (The more you answer yes, the more you may be suffering from pride).

Are you blind to your imperceptible pride? Try to answer these questions honestly.

- Are you overly competitive or dislike when others show off?
- Do you feel upset when others get attention (especially the attention you feel you deserve)?
- Is it easy for you to criticize others? Is it hard for you to accept criticism?
- Do you constantly compare your actions to others’ actions?
- Do you get upset when others wrong you or disrespect you, even if they do it indirectly?
- Are you hurt when others ignore you?
- Do you think excessively of yourself and how other people perceive you (to the point where it affects the actions you take)?
- Do you think you are humble?
- Do you feel like doing mundane things are a waste of your time?
- Are you bitter when you are surpassed by others or when you see others succeed?
- Do you fear failure and have unrealistically high expectations of yourself (and others)?
- Do you struggle to love others unconditionally?

“Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults.” (Psalm 19:12)