

On the Steps of Humility and Pride, III: The Truth in Love

by St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Since, then, the very perception of the truth comes in three steps, I will distinguish them briefly, if I can, so that it can be more clearly made known to which of the three steps of truth the twelve steps of humility reach.

For we seek the truth in ourselves, in our brothers, and in its own nature. In ourselves, by judging ourselves; in our brothers, by sharing in the ills they suffer; in its own nature, by contemplating with a pure heart. Take note of both the number and the order. First, let the Truth itself teach you that its nature must be sought in your brothers before in yourself. After all in the enumerating of the beatitudes in his own preaching he set the merciful before the pure of heart.

For indeed, the merciful quickly catch on to the truth in their brothers, since they extend to them the very motions of their soul, and so conform themselves to them by love that they experience the others' goods and ills as their very own. With the weak they are weak, with the scandalized they burn. They are used to rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. Once their heart's vision has been cleansed by this fraternal love, they delight to contemplate the truth in its own nature, for love of which they bear the ills of others.

But those who do not associate themselves with their brothers thus, but rather scoff at those who weep, or disparage those who rejoice, how can they catch on to the truth in their brothers, when they do not experience in themselves what they see in

Sed quia ipsa quoque veritatis agnitio in tribus gradibus consistit, ipsos breviter, si possum, distinguo, quatenus ex hoc clarior innotescat, ad quem trium veritatis, duodecimus humilitatis pertingat.

Inquirimus namque veritatem in nobis, in proximis, in sui natura. In nobis, nosmetipsos diiudicando; in proximis, eorum malis compatiendo; in sui natura, mundo corde contemplando. Observa sicut numerum, ita et ordinem. Primo te doceat Veritas ipsa, quod prius in proximis quam in sui debeat inquiri natura. Post haec accipies, cur prius in te quam in proximis inquirere debeas. In numero siquidem beatitudinum, quas suo sermone distinxit, prius misericordes quam mundicordes posuit.

Misericordes quippe cito in proximis veritatem deprehendunt, dum suos affectus in illos extendunt, dum sic per caritatem se illis conformant, ut illorum vel bona, vel mala, tamquam propria sentiant. Cum infirmis infirmantur, cum scandalizatis uruntur. *Gaudere cum gaudentibus, flere cum flentibus* consueverunt. Hac caritate fraterna cordis acie mundata, veritatem delectantur in sui contemplari natura, pro cuius amore mala tolerant aliena.

Qui vero se ita fratribus non consociant, sed e contrario aut flentibus insultant, aut gaudentibus derogant, dum quod in illis est, in se non sentiunt, quia similiter affecti non sunt, veritatem in proximis qualiter deprehendere possunt? Bene namque convenit

them? So the common proverb suits them well: The healthy man does not know what the sick man feels, or the full man what the hungry man suffers.

And the sick man has compassion on the sick, and the hungry on the hungry, all the more intimately as he knows it more closely. For just as the pure truth is seen only by the pure heart, so a brother's misery is felt more truly by a merciful heart. But in order for you to have a heart that is merciful in the face of another's misery, you must first acknowledge your own, so that you find your brother's soul in yours, and know how to help him from your own self, by the example, that is, of our Savior, who willed to suffer that he might know how to have compassion, to be miserable that he might learn to have mercy, so that, as is written of him, "And he learned obedience from what he suffered", so also he might learn mercy. Not that he did not know before how to have mercy, he whose mercy is from all eternity and unto all eternity; but rather that what he knew by nature from all eternity, he learned by experiencing it in time.

illis illud vulgare proverbium : Nescit sanus quid sentiat aeger, aut plenus quid patiatur ieiunus.

Et aeger aegro, et ieiunus ieiuno quanto propinquius, tanto familiarius compatiuntur. Sicut enim pura veritas non nisi puro corde videtur, sic miseria fratris verius misero corde sentitur. Sed ut ob alienam miseriam cor miserum habeas, oportet tuam prius agnoscas, ut proximi mentem in tua invenias, et ex te noveris qualiter illi subvenias, exemplo scilicet Salvatoris nostri, qui pati voluit ut compati sciret, miser fieri ut misereri disceret, ut quomodo de ipso scriptum est : *Et didicit ex his quae passus est obedientiam*, ita disceret et misericordiam. Non quod ante misereri nesciret, cuius misericordia ab aeterno et usque in aeternum; sed quod natura sciebat ab aeterno, temporali didicit experimento.