

Humility Rooted in Charity

By Greg Parent



For the past few years I have spent my summers working with high school students doing camping retreats. It can be very frustrating to work with young people at times, especially young men. I can easily forget that at the deepest level of each person's soul a battle is raging. Our Lord is relentlessly pursuing each soul. He desires a response of love and abandonment, but His pursuits are often drowned out by lies from the evil one which are unfortunately reinforced very strongly by our culture. If we are going to effectively minister to anyone, we need to be aware of what lies they are being told by the father of lies so that we can help counter them with the truths of Jesus Christ.

For men, especially young men, I think that there are two main lies that are brilliantly sewn by

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the evil one. They are his two most powerful weapons in his quest for the ruin of souls. His first weapon is pride. The vice of pride is his front lines. It is his battalion of tanks and bombers that we all see coming and are aware of, but it is so powerful that we struggle to do anything about it. This is especially present for young men as they are bombarded with the world telling them what it means to be a 'man'. They are told to be tough, athletic, and unemotional; they are told that the only man worth respecting is the self-made man who should not need help with anything. In short, they are told

that their worth is based entirely off of what they *do*, and how successfully they do it. It's all about me, and I have to measure up to you; it's a competition. Pride very forcefully takes root because if I have spent all of my effort building myself into an exteriorly impressive fortress, then all I will know how to talk about is just that. Some symptoms of this deep wound can be easily seen just by spending time with a group of young men. All of them want to be the one who knows stuff. There is very little actual conversation, but rather a lot of storytelling of all of the awesome stuff they have done. Many times a guy will rattle off facts that are at best only peripherally relevant; they serve only to show that he knows them. On the other end of the spectrum, if a guy is not an expert in something, then he often acts as if it is of no importance whatsoever. He blows it off and makes a joke of it so his incompetence doesn't manifest itself. Religion often falls into this category, so a religious education classroom full of young men can drive even the most patient teacher crazy, and I think it is largely because of how artfully the enemy has planted pride in their hearts.

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So how does one go about handling guys like this? As adults charged with forming them, it may be tempting for us to get frustrated with them and just crush their pride. After all, in our maturity we see how ridiculous it is. It can seem like a good idea to go with the 'break and rebuild' strategy. Show them that they aren't as cool as they think they are; put them in their place, and then build them back

up. We have to remember, though, that we have an exceedingly brilliant enemy. He knows that we will be tempted toward this strategy. This is where his second weapon comes into play. This weapon is fear. In contrast to pride being his front lines, fear is his silent assassin. It creeps into the heart and slowly poisons it. It goes hand-in-hand with pride because as pride grows, the fear of that pride being crushed also grows. The lives of the many young men caught in this trap are exhausting because they are so concerned with what everyone else thinks. Fear coupled with pride is a delicate downward spiral that has been masterfully crafted by the enemy of souls. Soon all that young men feel able to do is walk down their school halls with their chests puffed out, only acknowledging the existence of others with a grunt and an up-nod. They are like an upside-down pyramid balancing on its tip with pride and fear mixed together perfectly to keep it balanced. If their youth ministers and religious education teachers crush their pride as is very tempting to do, the balance of this pyramid will be jarred and thrown off. Pride will crumble leaving only fear to reign supreme and the poor guy will crumble in upon himself and probably fall off the deep end. Satan wins.

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Despite how it may sometimes seem, there is a way to help guys in our culture, but it is very subtle and often difficult. As the hand of God reaching out to His wounded sons, those of us involved with youth ministry in any way must manifest the virtues that oppose the vices. Humility is the antithesis of pride and perfect love casts out all fear. Humility is often misunderstood as being self-deprecating, but I like a definition that I heard in a homily once. The priest said, “Humility is not to think little of oneself, humility is to not think of oneself at all.” Despite how hardened and obstinate the young men that we minister to can seem to be, they need patience and compassion more than a heavy hand. I think that if you humbly and selflessly show them that they are unconditionally loved by the God of the Universe the downward spiral can be slowly but surely reversed and gradually they will open up and begin to manifest the virtues that they admire in you.



Greg Parent is a seminarian for the Diocese of Green Bay. When he was in 8th grade, his entire family converted to the Catholic faith. After getting involved in CYE, he met the Lord in Eucharistic Adoration and encountered other young, on-fire Catholics who helped him discern his entrance into seminary. He enjoys the outdoors, praying through St. Therese’s intercession, basketball, football, and visiting the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help. God willing, he will be ordained a priest for our Diocese in 4 years!