2nd Sunday after Trinity
Series on the Seven Deadly Sins
Bessemer - 1959
W. Henrietta - 1960
Pelham Manor - 1962

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IN NOMINE JESU

James 4: 6 God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

PRIDE

It was Gregory the Great who first formulated the list of the seven deadly sins. It is a list that bears repeating in our day, when people are inclined to overlook the enormity of sin and therefore also the need of a Savior from sin. For unless we understand ourselves as we really are - sinful and corrup through and through - and in that condition stand beneath the Cross of Christ to hear Him say: Thy sins be forgiven thee! - we shall find no escape from the great surge of anxiety and restless tension that has gripped our age.

The sin of pride is put at the head of the list. Text If there is one thing, above all others, that keeps us from God and Christ and the Cross, it is pride. If there is one thing that makes us repulsive to our fellow men, it is pride. Prid as one man has put it, is the excessive and inordinate love of one's self, seeking to play God - the creature trying to take the place of the Creator. Ever since Eve succumbed to pride in the garden of Eden, when the devil told her, Ye shall be as gods, pride has been enemy number one of the human race. Little, puny, men would shake their tiny fists at the Most High God and shout with Pharaoh: Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice! And, I dare say, this includes all of us.

The problem lies in the fact that we must live with ourselves. If we judge ourselves honestly, if we examine our consciences, if we try to see what sort of people we really are, then we make ourselves quite uncomfortable. We can't face it. Thus pride comes forward, and we attempt to cover up our sins. We don't want to recognize our own inferiority, and so we proceed to sugar-coat and white-wash the evil in our lives. But, mind you, it is only sugar-coating and white-wash; the corruption itself is not removed.

First of all, I try to lower the level of morality down to suit my own measure. I say to myself: Well, I am as good as the next fellow. Or I establish my own set of rules like I pay my taxes, I mend my fences, and I don't kick my neighbor's dog. We settle for a set of good manageable rules and then we feel less uncomfortable about ourselves. Or we find some specific way of justifying

our conduct. Well, you see, I was a dead-end kid; I never had a chance. I couldn't take it any longer. Sometimes we relieve ourselves by focusing on some supposed good that has come out of what would otherwise seem evil: I really told her off; but it'll do her a world of good! (to do her a world of good being, of course, the reason for telling her off!) The most common way that the reviewers dealt with the famous Kinsey Report was this: A lot of people do a lot of things we thought were wrong; so I guess they're not wrong any more. There is a modern translation of one of the verses in I Corinthians 13 - that famous passage on love - which says, Love does not rejoice in the statistics of evil. You see, we often rejoice in the statistics of evil, because by them we can find that we are not so bad.

Often, even much that is good and noble in our actions is done because of self-love and pride. Very often we do good to be seen of men, or at least of ourselves, or to try to earn favor and status with God. Not long ago a man remarked in my presence that he felt he was paying his obligations to God when we went to church. That was pride talking. I may give a five-dollar bill to a needy person for a number of reasons. I may want others to note my generosity. I may feel that this would be a quicker way to deal with the man than to go into his problem more deeply and work out permanent solutions for his needy condition. I may hope that he will do me a favor, such as speaking well of my deed. I may give him the five dollars because it makes me feel good to do a cheritable work. I may feel that this will help make up for the fact that I slighted someone yesterday. Or I may actually give him the money because I am grateful for the many blessings that have come to me throughout my life. But I fear that more often than not we do good in order to camouflage the real condition of our hearts. This is brought out most clearly in Mussolini's Autobiography, in which he says: I do not drink; I do not smoke; and I am not interested in cards or games....As for the love of the table, I don't appreciate it....In every hour of my life it is the spiritual element which leads me on....I have annihilated in myself every egoism....I feel that all Italians understand and love me; I know that only he is loved who leads without weakness,

without deviation, and with disinterested and full faith. Compare these words with those of Paul, I am chief of sinners, and the difference is obvious. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

The trouble with pride is that it keeps us in the ruts we're in. We keep on doing the same things and having the same bad tempers. We tell ourselves, You see, I've always had a bad temper, that's the way I am, so we don't change. We keep on being objectionable to people and we never quite find out why a lot of people don't like us, because we never allow ourselves to face ourselves. And when we make these excuses, it does not get rid of the sense of guilt or the filth of sin; it simply puts blankets on it. The moment we relax - on a vacation perhaps - there springs before our minds a veritable floor show of demons. Events of five, ten, twenty years ago that we thought had been covered up become clear images.

How then can we be honest with ourselves, do away with pride, and still live with ourselves? We must be able to live with ourselves, we must accept ourselves, or we can't go on. Pride is not the answer, because, in the first place, all pride does is attempt gloss over the evil in our lives; it does not get rid of it. Secondly, pride and self-conceit make us repulsive both to God and our fellow men. The problem is not unlike that of a garbage-disposal. You can't leave your garbage around the kitchen; nor can you lock it up in the cupboards and closets, because the smell of the spoiling food will make you sick. We usually arrange to to have some outside agency take it off our hands. So with guilt and sin: we can't live with it, we can't afford to hide it in the unconscious by denying that it is sin; we need it taken off our hands.

And this is the good news of the Gospel - that God has the resources of taking in to Himself all the hurt, the sin, the guilt of the world. That is why for Christians the Cross is the central symbol. On the Cross we see Christ taking our sins, taking up the slack between God's aweful righteousness and our sinfulness. In Christ God meets us just where we are. In Christ God translates Himself into the language of human life and He meets me where I am, just as I am, without

one plea - not as I ought to be, but as I am. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. God in Christ is the outside agency who picks up the garbage of my life. I don't have to carry the trash of my life along with me all my years going back over it, sorting it out, attempting to get rid of it, trying to hide it Christ takes unto Himself the burden of my sin. It is better to have it collected daily. A well-run kitchen is organized that way. In our personal lives, we dare do no less.

Standing thus beneath the Cross there springs up in my heart a humility that is born of gratitude. There is no room for pride here. There is no room for good works. It is not by my own merits or worthiness that I gain acceptance, but only by the unbounded grace of God. That is the Gospel. I can now accept myself honestly - just as I am - because God accepts me even though I am unacceptable. When I understand this, I can understand the words of Kierkegaard, the great Danish theologian of a century ago, who said, The Christian religion is this, the profound humiliation of man, the boundless love of God, and endless striving born out of gratitude. Now in humble gratitude I strive to be more like the person I am not. God takes me to be righteous, and so in my gratitude I want to be more righteous. I cannot stand before God on my own two feet, but in Christ I can stand.

This kind of humility boasts of nothing. It does everything out of gratitude. It does not point its finger at self - so that everyone can see - as if to say: See how humble I am. This attitude toward humility can be illustrated by the story of the Carthusian monk who was explaining to a stranger the characteristics of his little-known Order. As for learning, we're not to be compared with the Jesuits, he said. When it comes to good works, we don't match the Fransiscans. As to preaching, we're not in a class with the Dominicans. But, he concluded, when it comes to humility, we're tops.

I'm referring to the kind of humility that owes its entire existence to the love and grace of God, that, therefore, will endeavor and endure anything for

God out of gratitude to Christ. The historical novel Quo Vadis, based upon legendary accounts of Peter's last days, gives a true insight into the extent real humility in Christ will go. Escaping over the walls of Rome at a time when his fellow Christians were being tortured by Nero, Peter was suddenly confronted with his Lord. Falteringly he asked, Domine, quo vadis? (Lord, whither goest thou?) And the Lord answered with words that pierced again to the very heart: My people have need of me. I am going to Rome to be crucified again. Whither goest thou, Peter? Then Peter remembered the other time he had needed to be jerked up out of the sleep of self-love by his Master's going to the cross. Again Peter repented of his pride under the shadow of the Cross. He returned to Rome, where they crucified him with his head downward because he said he was unworthy to die as his Master had died. From Simon the self-loving braggart he had become Peter the Rock.

Christ is standing today at the cross-roads in every one of our lives, crying, Where are you going? He calls to us to let Him take the garbage and filth out of our lives. Shall we in haughty pride say, No. God help us to answer in sincere humility:

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Then the remainder of our lives will be lived in grateful love to Jesus, and we will say with St. Paul: It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Amen.