

My Image in front of Others

Objectives

- ❖ To learn why trying to impress others actually draws us away from God and weakens our relationship with him.

References

- ❖ Holy Scripture
- ❖ One Should Not Praise Himself; Vainglory and the Evil of Pride by Habib Guirguis (Coptic hymn.net)

Scriptural Verse

- ❖ “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matthew 6: 1)
- ❖ “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matthew 6: 6)

Lesson Outline

We all have a need for praise and when we are praised we feel good about it. Part of what motivates us to pursue our ambitions and to excel is when we hear praise and encouragement from others. However, there are times when going out of our way to seek the praise of people it becomes a detriment and rather than it being helpful it becomes quite harmful. See the story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira (Acts 5: 1- 11).

- ❖ **Our desire for praise leads to the deception of others and ourselves.** When we try to impress others we deliberately cover up our weaknesses and we live with a duality that we are not even aware of. This prevents us from growing in communion with God, who desires honesty and truth in us. Not only must our hearts be honest before God but our worship too. The Pharisees were a perfect example of this; they missed the spirit of prayer which is an intimate relationship with God in order to use empty words and appearances to please others (see Matthew 6:5-6).
- ❖ **Fitting in with others makes us lose our identity as Christians.** We get a feeling of security from fitting in. We enjoy the companionship, the satisfaction of being accepted by others. Fitting in is more fun than being a loner. But that is not God’s intention for us. We are called to be different in order to bring others to the knowledge of the Truth “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12: 2).

- ❖ **The desires of man conflict with God's desires.** It is much easier to please those who we see and get a reward instantly than to please God who we do not see and who will reward us later "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts" (1 Thessalonians 2:4).
- ❖ **Pleasing others will never be enough.** It is like running after a mirage because you can never please all people all of the time. "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe. Many seek the ruler's favor, but justice for man comes from the Lord" (Proverbs 29:25-26).
- ❖ **Overcoming the desire to please others is a struggle that requires much grace from God.** Pleasing others always involves some deviation from the truth and a lack of honesty within us. We see examples of godly people falling in such a snare. The Jews who came from Jerusalem came to impose Jewish customs on the Gentiles. St. Peter feared them and tried to appease them so he started to separate himself from the Gentiles. St. Paul told him that he was not being straightforward about the truth of the Gospel (Galatians 2:11-14). St. Peter lived as a gentile, free from the law but when the Jews came he changed his customs.

Conclusion

- ❖ Pleasing others is harmful as it distracts us from looking honestly inside ourselves. Therefore we lose the opportunity to get closer to God and to develop an intimate relationship with Him.
- ❖ God loves an honest heart even if it is not perfect like David's heart
- ❖ We must always ask ourselves why we are doing certain things or behaving in certain ways. Are we doing it for man's sake or for God's sake?

Activities / Discussion Points

- ❖ Study the story of Ananias and Sapphira (they sold the field to please men).
- ❖ They were punished because they were not honest to God.
- ❖ Always ask yourself "am I doing things for man's sake or for God's sake?"