

Humility - The Eleventh Step

The eleventh step of humility is that when they speak, they speak gently and without laughter, humbly and with becoming modesty, with few and sensible words, and not loud of voice, as it is written: "A wise person is known through his few words." (*St. Benedict's Rule: An Inclusive Translation and Daily Commentary by Judith Suter, OSB*)

Humility, as the fundamental monastic virtue, is intended to correct excessive pride, that human characteristic so destructive of intimacy with God. Pride and humility are also evident qualities in the ordinary interactions of human relations, and speech is the primary vehicle of these interactions.

So often today we are preoccupied with issues of power and authority, what constitutes them, and how they can be expressed...the simplicity of Benedict's description of the speech of the humble is truly powerful. Here indeed is a vivid portrait of what authority looks like in the humble person, the person who lives near God. (*Preferring Christ: A Devotional Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict by Norene Vest*)

It really doesn't take a flood of words or great volume to express wisdom. In fact, it's generally the opposite. The more we talk, the more problems we cause for ourselves and others. Some people feel the need to expound on everything around them, especially political or other matters that annoy them.

Even on the positive, I can remember once wanting to do a deep dive into something good that had happened to me and explore its meaning and the threat to my humility and whatever else. Seeking the advice of a wise sister, as to what my prayer and spiritual response should be, she smiled gently and said, "Just say thank you and move on."

What are the clues that suggest to me that someone is humble and holy?

How do the holy people I know express themselves?

Are there things I tend to think or say too much about?

(St. Benedict's Rule: An Inclusive Translation and Daily Commentary by Judith Suter, OSB)