



# Boston Catholic Journal

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## The Imitation of Christ

by **Father Thomas à Kempis**  
of the Canons Regular of Mount St. Agnes  
(1380 - 1471)

### A STUDY

*The following pages are dedicated to the Little Hearts entrusted by God  
to Cloistered Poor Clare Colettine Nuns*

## Chapter 7

### AVOIDING FALSE HOPE AND PRIDE

**"VAIN** is the man who puts his trust in men, in created things.

Do not be ashamed to serve others for the love of Jesus Christ and to seem poor in this world. Do not be self-sufficient but place your trust in God. Do what lies in your power and God will aid your good will. Put no trust in your own learning nor in the cunning of any man, but rather in the grace of God Who helps the humble and humbles the proud.

If you have wealth, do not glory in it, nor in friends because they are powerful, but in God Who gives all things and Who desires above all to give Himself. Do not boast of personal stature or of physical beauty, qualities which are marred and destroyed by a little sickness. Do not take pride in your talent or ability, lest you displease God to Whom belongs all the natural gifts that you have.

Do not think yourself better than others lest, perhaps, you be accounted worse before God Who knows what is in man. Do not take pride in your good deeds, for God's judgments differ from those of men and what pleases them often displeases Him. If there is good in you, see more good in others, so that you may remain humble. It does no harm to esteem yourself less than anyone else, but it is very harmful to think yourself better than even one. The humble live in continuous peace, while in the hearts of the proud are envy and frequent anger."

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### ***Sister's Commentary:***

#### **I.**

There are few certainties in life, this we know. However few you can enumerate (and, yes, there are certainties beyond "taxes and death"), it is unlikely that the following will be among them, although everyone who endeavors to follow Jesus Christ should grasp it immediately. And yet, oddly we do not. Since we have such a dearth of certainty, we should, then, be very grateful and deem it our good fortune to be given one more thing about which we can have absolutely no doubt whatever, and it is this:

"You can be certain that if you are on good terms with the world, you are not on good terms with God."

This is in striking contrast to our almost instinctual belief that if we are esteemed by the world, by the many, then surely we are also esteemed by God. Is not my hard won popularity a testimony to the fact that I am good? I can bring witnesses to account who will vouch for me, indeed, many witnesses precisely because I am popular, and not without reason, for I am good --- it is both recognized and consequently rewarded. I please many people, am I to believe that I do not also please God Who surely sees my goodness even more clearly than they do, to whom I am good? What is this insolence?

It is this: *"God's judgments differ from those of men and what pleases them often displeases Him. If there is good in you, see more good in others, so that you may remain humble. It does no harm to esteem yourself less than anyone else, but it is very harmful to think yourself better than even one.*

What is more, if you are on good terms with the world --- loved, respected, honored, esteemed, popular --- you must understand that the world is not on good terms with God. It never was. It never will be. Christ has told us again and again, as did Saint Paul and all the Saints in the Roman Martyrology, that if we follow Him the world will hate us.

Ask yourself this: what was the world's response to Jesus Christ?

It crucified Him! It crucified Saint Peter, and beheaded Saint Paul. Each road leading to Rome was a thicket of Crosses upon which hung those who followed Christ (and did not turn away, did not turn back) ... and not the world. Had they been on better terms with the world they would have, instead, joined the jeering mob at the great "Spectacles" in the Coliseum when other Christians, on equally poor terms with the world, were led like lambs to the slaughter, to the beasts, to the sword. Men, women ... and yes, children. Someday, promise yourself to read about Saint Perpetua.

It was the fulfillment of Christ's promise to them ... and to us: *"If the world hates you, remember that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"*<sup>1</sup>

If the world loves you, tremble. If you are friends of the powerful and the renowned, do not rejoice, but fear. You know the ways of the world and that they are not the ways of God. If you have found favor with *"the world which loves its own"*, you are at enmity with God.

It is inescapable. Power, wealth, privilege, renown ... how was it attained? Over whom was it acquired? **DESPITE WHOM** was it zealously pursued (God!) ... and at what cost to others, and to their own immortal souls?

We like to "rub shoulders" with the rich, the powerful, the famous, as though it were a blessing, and not a contagion, that we acquired as a result of it --- that we may be further esteemed and thought more important in the eyes of others.

Father Thomas a Kempis speaks well in telling us, *"esteem yourself less than anyone else, but it is very harmful to think yourself better than even one."*

Think about it the next time you purchase your power or esteem at the expense of another, to acquire "note" and "good standing" in the world of men.

Thus was Herod esteemed in his Court and Pilot in Fortress Antonia. Men of power and means who detested each other. How many sought to insinuate themselves into their favor and share, in some trifling way, their power over men. Even the power of life and death ... or so they presumed. It is very much to the point, and apropos of this chapter, that Pilate and Herod "became friends" --- on the day they Crucified Christ.<sup>2</sup>

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## II.

It is vanity and great foolishness to run after those in high and influential positions, or to be blinded and overly impressed with the celebrities and 'stars' of this world.

The inordinate seeking of honours or efforts to ingratiate ourselves to those in 'offices' those in 'chairs' will not bring us honor, but sorrow, and inevitably lead to great disappointment and disillusionment.

God has a path for each and everyone of us, He alone will bring us to that state of life in which we have the greatest potential to bring Him glory and to grow in holiness. If, instead, we force ourselves to go where we are not called, it will be to our peril. Rather we should seek to serve God, seek His kingdom, the wealth of His grace, and to labour to bring Him glory, and to serve the poor among us, in whatever way they are impoverished --- in body, in spirit, or in heart. To such belong the Kingdom!

One of "the poor" may be a member of our own family, someone struggling to attain a degree of hope, or a person whose trust has been shattered by life, or victims of broken and once beautiful relationships. There is great poverty of spirit in all these situations!

It is not so much that we have wealth, but rather, our attitude toward it, and the way so many measure their another's value against it. If we indeed have wealth, we should not glory in it, nor presume ourselves to be much for having much. Instead, with a humble heart, acknowledge that apart from God you are nothing and have nothing. Render, then, thanks to God and pray for guidance to be wise, generous, and loving stewards with the abundance He has entrusted to us.

How much wealth is achieved through evil means: through the manipulation and exploitation of others which is nothing less than an attempt to manipulate and exploit Christ Jesus Who is in "*the least of these*" (St. Matthew 25.40). In this chapter of the Imitation we are being encouraged to turn away from vain and vanishing worldly interests, indeed, to turn away from our very selves and to look to something --- and Someone --- much, much greater: God.

Despite all our most vigorous efforts, our transient physical beauty *will* pass, and none in this world ever possessed eternal youth. But a greater, a wider, a far more majestic door is open to us all: to grow in spiritual beauty, to grow closer and closer to Christ. To live in His will, such a person becomes beautiful beyond all words, and in them we find, beyond all our expectations, that heaven already begins here on earth.

Let us pray for those possessed of great riches and who know not the Lord Jesus. They deserve our prayers and compassion, for they walk on the most superficial surface of human existence, and for all appearances of happiness and harmony, know neither, for they do not know the joy of being loved by God, nor do they see anything beyond this world. Is there a more narrow, hopeless, and sadder existence? Have mercy upon them. Do not despise them. Rather, earnestly pray for them, that you may be sons and daughters of the Most High God<sup>3</sup> for they are, withal, our brothers and sisters and as the most sinful among us realizes, God's grace can accomplish all things !

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<sup>1</sup> St. John 15.18-19

<sup>2</sup> St. Luke 23.12

<sup>3</sup> St. Mathew 5.45

*Your Little Sisters in Christ  
with our co-worker, Joseph Mary*



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