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St. Michael the Archangel expels Lucifer from heaven in this 1640s oil painting by Ignacio de Ries. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)



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St. Michael the Archangel expels Lucifer from heaven in this 1640s oil painting by Ignacio de Ries. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

I was wondering how "capital sins" got their name and found it in the Catholic Education Resource Center. Fr. William Saunders writes that capital sins are so called because they are the source of all sins. They are the reflection of actual sins, which may be mortal or venial. Mortal sins particularly lead to the spiritual

corruption of the person whose life is permeated by vice. Capital sins are specified by Pope St. Gregory the Great in the same reference as pride, avarice, lust, envy, gluttony, anger and sloth.

I was particularly interested in reading about pride — excessive belief in one's own abilities that interferes with the individual's recognition of the grace of God. In my opinion, this means a person driven by pride attributes his/her success to personal effort and good plans, not accounting for God's mercy and grace. This is only a great illusion, since all that we are and have are gifts from God the creator of the universe and all that is in it.

Saunders went on to explain that pride is said to be "complete" when a person is so filled with it that he refuses to subject his intellect and will to God, and to obey His commandments. A good illustration is that of Lucifer, the former angel of God that rebelled against his creator and was sent away. Such a person has contempt for God and those who represent Him. A person with complete pride makes himself a god.

Pride may be considered incomplete when the person does not reject God or his superiors, but simply thinks of himself too highly. This sounds like the sin of the majority of us human beings. Inasmuch as we do not go so far as to reject God, we still think highly of ourselves — a sin that blurs our vision so we can't see clearly what lies in the word of God and in all the teachings meant to keep us growing in our personal relationship with our Father and Creator.

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A good example of pride is seen in our unpredictable election season in Kenya. It is normally marked with fears and anxieties because as a nation we do not elect persons for their previous track record or capabilities, but rather we vote in "community line." He/she belongs to my community regardless.

A story was told about the 2007 election: Passengers were traveling from the city to a rural area, when an individual called to the driver, "Hey, stop the vehicle and allow the government to go for a short call." ("Short call" here means to use the bathroom, and by "government" they meant the party supposed to win.) At face value the statement seems OK, but given the season, the language used in public and the fact

that they had hardly left the city implies it was meant to hurt, to incite and fuel a situation already bad enough. Whenever I think of the incident, I can only conclude that pride is selfish, it is insensitive, uncaring and provocative — to say the least.

The way to fight pride is by loving genuinely, as illustrated by John Powell in his book Why am I afraid to love? He writes:

> Love which of its essence seeks only the good of others and is willing to pay the high price of self-forgetfulness, is a product which is hard to imitate or counterfeit. To love, one must have enormous motivation. In a world that is gouging and clawing for the riches of this world, Christians by their commitment to loving should stand out as breathtaking exceptions. True Christians must seek only the good, the fulfillment and the destiny of their fellow human beings. It is difficult. Yet the Lord Jesus of the Gospels stands with us, and gives us our Christian imperative: "By this shall others know that you are my disciples, that you love one another."

I remember it well. Five years ago, on my way to visit a sick friend, I attended a prayer session in a nearby church. I sat in front, and from right behind me I heard one of the most beautiful voices I have ever heard. After the prayer session I turned to look at the owner of the voice I had been admiring. On the way out of the church, I complimented her: "Hi, you have such a quality natural voice. If only you can have it trained!" Her reply was startling: "Voice! You have come when it has changed. I used to have a superb voice and would sing to everyone’s amazement!"

While the singer could be right that her voice was no longer as strong as it was, only pride and vainglory would cause one to respond to a total stranger in such a manner. It was my first time to meet her. If the roles were reversed, I would simply say "thank you for the compliment" and consider if it was a good idea to attend some music classes to fine-tune my natural gift.

This is only one incident, but I have experienced many people who are uncomfortable with compliments. They do not know how to behave when someone comments on their qualities. In my opinion some people behave in this manner due to pride — they never considered the gift in question as a free gift of God, which is actually meant for others.

On my way home, I passed the same church since it was along the highway, and stopped to pray. This time there was a group of youth rehearsing for a play, since it was nearing Christmas festivities. I decided to remain at the back of the church, while the youth were in front. However, I was able to note with keen interest the leadership skills of the director. After the practice I called him and complimented him for the leadership he had demonstrated. The reply of the young man was beautiful. "I do appreciate that others can observe my gifts and share the same with me. You may not realize what empowerment accompanies your compliment. Thank you so much."

In the words of President John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." In conclusion, pride — the main obstacle to offering unselfish service to others — can only be fought with the same audacity used to fight COVID-19.