



ICON OF THE EXTREME HUMILITY

Christians are meant to be humble, and it is Jesus Christ Himself Who calls us to humility. Yet this crucial virtue is very illusive: as soon as we think we have it, we don't.

St. John Climacus explains this "problem" of humility from the perspective of avoiding pride (vainglory):

"The sun shines on all alike, and vainglory beams on all activities. For instance I am vainglorious when I fast, and when I relax the fast to be unnoticed, I am again vainglorious by my prudence. When I am well dressed, I am quite overcome by vainglory. When I put on poor clothes, I am vainglorious again. When I talk I am defeated and when I am silent I am again defeated by it. However I throw this prickly thing, a

spike stands upright."

Yet before we despair St John also writes on how to attain true humility: *Behold true, Christian humility: in this you will be able to achieve victory over every vice, by attributing to God rather than to yourself the fact that you have won.*

To know what humility is we must look to Christ; to know how we gain humility we again look to Christ. Specifically we can look to the Icon of Christ called "Extreme Humility". This Icon shows the crucified Jesus Christ, in the tomb, usually bearing the marks of His murder and torture.

Here, "extreme" means "pre-eminent" or "ultimate". So what is "ultimate humility" according to this icon?

"At the arrival of unjust persecution, bow your head. At the jeers of false accusations, cross your arms over your heart, whether physically or interiorly, and gratefully receive what is spitefully offered. And when faced with the question, 'How far, how far do I tolerate this shame, this injustice', remember that the answer is the grave. This is what the icon labels 'Extreme Humility', and it is humility that we must strive to emulate each day."

-Hieromonk Irenaeus