

Respect For Others, The Most Rewarding Virtue

Mathews Mar Barnabas Metropolitan

Respect for others is proof of one's nobility. It evokes others' appreciation as it satisfies their craving for love, respect and acceptance. The craving for recognition is in fact the deepest craving in man. When we see others as God's children and as fellow-beings like ourselves, we tend to respect them instinctively, irrespective of their socio-economic status. The spirit of respect creates infinite joy, peace and progress everywhere. On the other hand, lack of respect and appreciation will cause unnecessary disappointment and failure.

St. Paul repeatedly emphasizes the paramount importance of showing full respect for others. "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward." (Col. 3:23-24) "In humility count others better than yourselves." (Phil. 2:3) "Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor." (Rom. 12:10)

In India, there is a custom of greeting by simultaneously bowing down and joining the palms and saying, 'Namaste' (I bow to you). This kind of greeting symbolizes the humility of the one who greets and respect for the one who is greeted. Such spirit of reverence should permeate all other activities.

We have to respect people who are less talented and versatile than we are. They too are God's children. It is not their fault that they do not have great talents. God gives different talents to His children so that all can work together in harmony for the common good.

We never lose anything by respecting others. In fact, we get the highest blessings in life, love and respect in return for respecting others. We empower people by respecting them, giving them more hope and courage to succeed in life.

We may now consider our Lord's examples of showing great respect for others. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ respected and honored John the Baptist by receiving baptism from him. He appreciated the loyalty of His disciples, saying: "You are those who have continued with Me in My trials." (St. Lk. 22:28) He gave the highest possible honor to the disciples by washing their feet like a slave. He restored and rehabilitated St. Peter who had denied Him thrice by giving him the commission to tend His lambs and sheep. (St. Jn. 21:15-17)

Let me narrate a personal experience I had as a student at Osmania University. I recall going to collect plants from the Adilabad forest, accompanied by my professors and classmates. All the staff and the students went to a cafeteria for light refreshments on our way back after the collection of plants. Since I was not in the habit of drinking coffee or tea, I stayed in the bus. Dr. Abdul Salaam, the Head of the Botany Department, who noticed it, brought me some snacks to enjoy. I was only a priest at

that time. Dr. Salaam's extraordinary thoughtfulness and respect for me (a student), despite my professing a different faith, is amazingly admirable. People of Dr. Salaam's caliber will always be recognized and honored universally by everyone.

There is a story of a monastery with five old members. They failed to attract new comers. They were in search of a solution. The Rabbi of a Synagogue in the neighborhood told the Father Superior that one of them was Christ. It meant that they should respect that person as Christ. So they tried to find out who among them was that person. First, they examined the virtues of each by turns. But they could not identify the right person. Finally, they agreed among themselves to treat one another to respect as they would deal with Christ. Another line of thought that came to them was that there was the possibility for everyone to be Christ. Hence, they decided to behave as Christ. The change that ensued as a result of these two decisions was remarkable. Consequently, visitors recognized the monastery as an ideal place for leading a godly life, and some of them joined as members. It is obvious that mutual respect leads to mutual love, trust, co-operation and all-round progress.

The question then arises why some people refuse to respect others. Perhaps, they erroneously think that if they respect others, they may be held in low esteem. But the truth is just the opposite. When people respect others and speak well of them, others in turn will be inclined to respect them and speak well of them.

Just imagine everyone respecting others whole-heartedly. Then there will be universal love, joy, peace and progress. Even foes will become friends. Respect for others is the remedy for rampant ill-feelings in the world. The tragedy is that even many of the educated people do not practice this virtue. Let us, therefore, start afresh, determined to make the virtue of respecting others the supreme virtue and an important motto of our mortal life on earth.