Nobody can express what humility is in words

Patristic reading

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Nobody can express what humility is in words and how it grows within the soul, unless he learns about it through experience. No one can learn about it from words alone.

Once, when Abba Zosimas was talking about humility, one of the Sophist philosophers was there, listening to what he was saying. He wanted to learn exactly what he meant and he asked him, "Tell me, why do you consider yourself to be a sinner? Do you not know that you are a saint? Do you not know that you bave virtues? Can you not sec that you are practising the commandments? How can you believe that you are a sinner since you do all these things?" The elder could not find words to formulate bis answer but he simply said to him, "I do not know how to explain it to you, but that's the way it is." The Sophist insisted and wanted to learn how this could be so. The elder, not finding words to explain it to him, started saying in his saintly simplicity, "Do not misunderstand me, indeed I am a sinner".

When I saw the elder wondering how to answer, I said to him "I wonder, is this not like sophistry and medicine? When, for example, the doctor or Sophist learns the art of medicine or sophistry well and practices it, it gradually becomes a habit for him, and, as I said, little by little the soul imperceptibly assumer this art by the practising of it. This is more or less the same with humility when, where by keeping the commandments, humility becomes a habit and it is not possible to give an explanation of this in words." When Abba Zosimas heard this, he was happy, embraced me and said, "You've found it; it is like you said." The Sophist was also satisfied and he himself accepted that explanation..

Dorotheos of Gaza, *Practical Teaching on the Christian Life* II,35-36