

BIS Psyche & Soul 40

NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER (NPD)

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Hello, this is Jose Parappully, Salesian priest and clinical psychologist at Sumedha Centre for Psychospiritual Wellbeing at Jeolikote, Uttarakhand, with another edition of Psyche & Soul.

In this weekend's edition I shall explore Narcissistic Personality Disorder which takes a toll especially on our interpersonal relationships.

Fr. Das Prakash was attending a renewal programme. He told the other participants that he had left his previous congregation because religious life there was not up to his expectations. He also disclosed that had been a theology professor and he had studied under Karl Rahner and done his doctoral thesis under Hans Kung, the two foremost theologians in the catholic Church during those years. His current congregation was very happy to have him and had put him to teach theology. He said his students considered him the best professor. He was now on a Sabbatical and his students were quite upset when he left.

It turned out that Fr. Das Prakash was forced to leave his previous congregation because those around him couldn't stand his haughty behaviour and the way he alienated both his professional colleagues and his students. There were also complaints about financial and relationship improprieties. He was given an early sabbatical by his current congregation because of numerous student complaints.

Fr. Das Prakash could fit the profile of one suffering from narcissistic personality disorder.

Narcissism can be thought of as spanning a continuum from healthy to the pathological, with the narcissistic personality style at the healthy end and the personality disorder at the pathological end.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), individuals with this disorder have a grandiose sense of self-importance. They routinely overestimate their abilities and inflate their accomplishments, often appearing boastful and pretentious. They believe that they are superior, special, or unique and expect others to recognize them as such and appreciate and admire them for the same. They may constantly fish for compliments, often with great charm. When others do not respond in the manner they expect, they can be very upset and may also react aggressively and will find justification for their aggression.

They may feel that they can only be understood by, and should only associate with, other people who are special or of high status and may attribute 'unique,' 'perfect,' or 'gifted' qualities to those with whom they associate. Often implicit in the inflated judgments of their own

accomplishments is an underestimation or devaluation of the contributions and capabilities of others. They may devalue the credentials, especially of those who disappoint them.

They are often preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love and often tend to compare themselves favorably with famous or privileged people.

They are very sensitive to any kind of criticism. It's hard for them to accept defeat. They may react with rage, disdain, or defiant counterattack. Others will see these reactions as exaggerated and overblown.

They establish unrealistic goals, based on their inflated convictions about their own power and ability. They tend to distort facts, and even engage in self-deception to preserve their illusions of grandiosity about themselves and the projects in which they are involved.

In reality their heir self-esteem is almost invariably very fragile. The excessive self-importance and need for appreciation and admiration is a compensation for this low self-esteem and emptiness they feel within. One reason they are very sensitive to criticism and defend against any kind of failure is that these intensify their feeling of inferiority. Even when they do not react outwardly, criticism may haunt these individuals and leave them feeling humiliated, degraded, hollow and empty.

They entertain a sense of entitlement which denotes the expectation of special favours, without assuming reciprocal responsibilities. They live under the illusion that they are privileged over others and that they deserve special consideration in life. They expect to be given whatever they want or feel they need, not matter what it might mean to others.

They may make positive first impressions, presenting themselves as socially competent, pleasant, and endearing. However, interpersonally they are exploitative and use others to indulge themselves and their desires. They have no empathy and lack sensitivity to the wants and needs of others. They exhibit an utter disregard for the thoughts, feelings, and wishes of others while exhibiting a profound dependency on their admiration. They can be quite oblivious to the hurt and pain they inflict on others.

They may indulge in pathological lying in order to maintain their grandiose self-image or to impress others. They ascribe some non-existing great achievement to themselves or to someone with whom they are closely associated. The latter case is form of grandiosity, where they are glowing in reflected glory, seeing the other as an extension of their idealized self. They have an intense craving for acceptance and approval from admired others. When they do not get them, they are deeply disappointed and then may deprecate them in revenge.

Their affective relationships are superficial, with minimal emotional ties or commitments. They are unable to come really close to anybody. They see others only as potential sources of gratification of their grandiosity, not as persons with needs and feelings of their own, and so cannot relate to them with real intimacy.

This profile certainly is a list of negative qualities. But that is the reality- the pathology that characterises the narcissistic personality. One can imagine how these characteristics will vitiate their interpersonal relationships.

Introspection and Prayer

What does this profile of the narcissistic person evoke in you? Can you recognise yourself in it? Or, those you associate with closely? If yes, how are these characteristics affecting your relationships and your daily life?\

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In the Gospel Jesus came across a number of people who were quite sure of their self-importance and loved to parade it. Jesus wanted to have little to do with these people and spoke quite disparagingly about them. Can you recognize some of them? What do they evoke in you?

Jesus presented himself as “meek and mild” and demonstrated his humility by washing the feet of the disciples that we reenact on Holy Thursday. Quite a contrasting profile from a narcissistic personality. May be you could stay for a while with the image of Jesus washing the disciples feet and what it evokes in you.

Have a safe, healthy, blessed weekend.
Thank you for listening/reading.

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