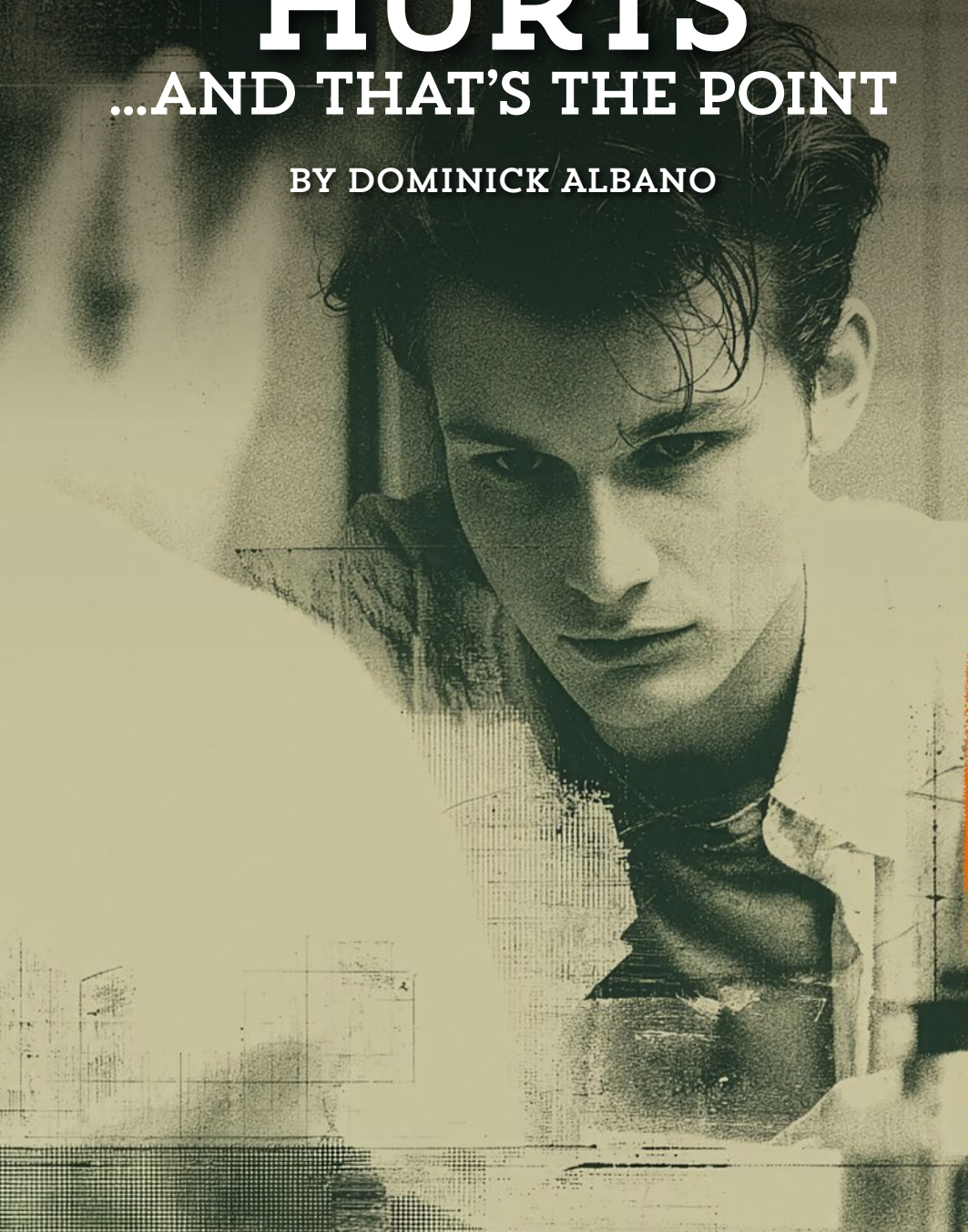


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HUMILITY HURTS

...AND THAT'S THE POINT

BY DOMINICK ALBANO



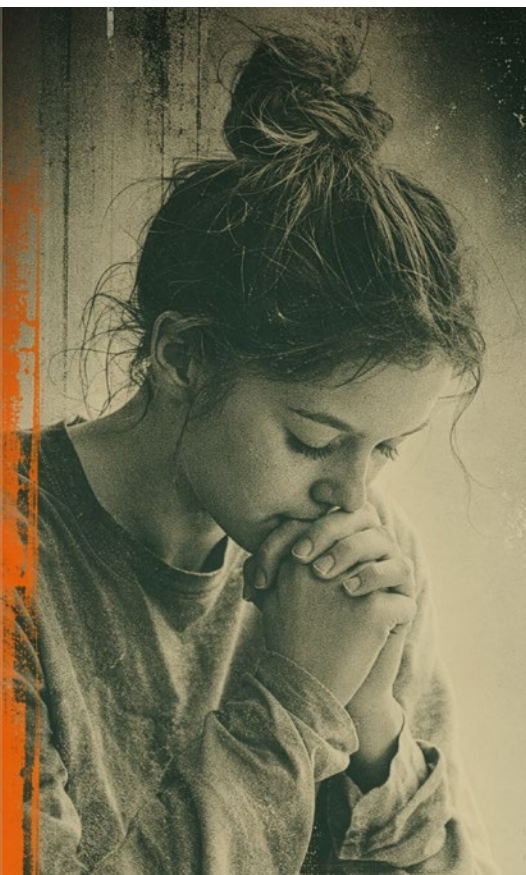
You'll never regret acting in humility. A friend shared this advice years ago, and I've never forgotten it. It applies in every circumstance you'll encounter, particularly to relationships. Your boss gives you feedback you don't agree with. Act with humility. A friend says something that lands wrong and probably wasn't meant that way. Act with humility. Someone at church rubs you the wrong way... every single week. Act with humility. Your kid's coach makes a decision you disagree with. Act with humility. Okay, sure. Sounds good. But let's be honest... easier said than done.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines humility as: "The virtue by which a Christian acknowledges that God is the

author of all good. Humility avoids inordinate ambition or pride and provides the foundation for turning to God in prayer. Voluntary humility can be described as 'poverty of spirit.'" It's a perfect definition drawn from the great wisdom of the Church. But what does it look like in our daily lives?

I'm talking about something deeper than "the opposite of arrogance." We all know what an arrogant person looks like (and hopefully, we all know to avoid arrogance ourselves). That part is kind of easy. And everyone, generally, would like to be described as humble. But what does it really look like to act in humility in the non-obvious circumstances of everyday life?

Forgive me, but I've got another baseball story. Recently, my 17-year-old son, Anthony, texted me after a tough baseball game. Anthony has always been one of the best players on whatever team he played on and is used to having tremendous success at the plate. He started his varsity baseball season with a triple, then a double, then another triple. He routinely got multiple hits per game and led the team in batting average. And then, out of nowhere, he started striking out. Nothing changed. No injury, no change in routine, no personal upset in his life... it just happened. Suddenly, he is going hitless with two or three strikeouts. One game you can shrug off, but he was going





on a full week's worth of games in this struggle. Instead of leading the team in batting average, he was now leading the team in strikeouts. Anthony felt horrible and didn't know what to do about it.

The root of the problem was not the poor batting average, the root of the problem was what the result said about himself: his belief about his ability. He believes wholeheartedly that God gave him the talent to be a great baseball player, but now, he is faced with the reality that for those games... he stunk. This is what makes humility hard: when you believe something and then encounter anything that challenges that belief. That's the true moment for humility.

While the Catechism's definition for humility is perfect, I'll offer you another framing to bring it down to a more human level: humility is staying open to the possibility that you don't have the full picture yet. Everyone loves to be right. It's part of the human condition. Studies have shown that the same region of the brain lights up both when you experience physical pain and when you experience social/emotional pain (like being wrong). Being excluded, dismissed, or flat out wrong is not metaphorically painful; the brain processes it similarly to when we are physically hurt.

So, being wrong is painful. For most of human history, being wrong had serious consequences.

Wrong about a predator, wrong about the weather, wrong about the food source... you died. The brain developed a strong protective bias around what it believes. Being wrong feels dangerous. Of course, that's not true today, but the brain still feels that way. Think you did a good job on a project, and get feedback that it isn't quite right? The brain thrusts you into this horrible feeling, and you enter survival mode. Oh no! I screwed up the expense report, am I about to be eaten by a mountain lion? That's a silly reframing, but be honest with yourself: haven't you ever been in a situation where you felt extreme stress, anxiety, and worry, even though you told yourself you shouldn't? Haven't you gotten worked up over something that you knew was no big deal?

There is a scientific term for these feelings: cognitive dissonance. When you hold a belief and encounter contradicting evidence, the brain doesn't treat it as neutral information... it treats it as a threat. When my son has a week's worth of bad baseball, his brain naturally induces his threat response. There's a reason his text said, "I don't know Dad. I've never felt this bad."

This is where humility comes in. Jesus is the Truth. The evil one is the lie. Humility is the grace — the gift from God — to experience the pain of having something you believe challenged by external evidence and move through that pain to find truth.



See, usually, we experience the pain of cognitive dissonance, and we try to run from it as quickly as we can. We defend, rationalize, or ignore it, or we can even numb ourselves to it!

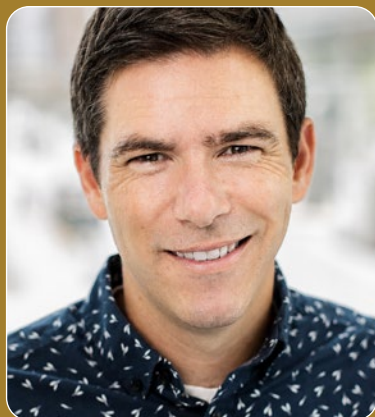
This is why habitual sin is such a problem. Sin is the greatest example of cognitive dissonance. You believe something to be wrong; you do it anyway. Now you must deal with this pain and discomfort (we call it guilt) of having done something that goes against what you believe. And what do we do? We justify it, rationalize it, ignore it, or if we keep going back to the sin repeatedly, eventually numb ourselves to it.

I told Anthony, word for word: The feeling isn't the enemy. Avoiding the feeling is. The guy who never feels the threat of losing his spot... always comfortable, always sure of himself... he stops working. Not because he's lazy. Because there's nothing pushing him. But the guy who feels it and runs from it — makes excuses, blames someone else, tells himself it's not a big deal — he stops growing, too. He's using all his

energy to protect his ego instead of getting better. The best athletes feel it and use it. They sit with the discomfort long enough to ask: what is this telling me? What do I need to do? That's it. That's the whole thing. The feeling that stinks right now? That's fuel. Don't waste it.

Jesus is the Truth. And everything in this life is about getting back to Jesus. Humility is the willingness to stay in the room with pain and discomfort long enough to let it do its work and find the truth. Maybe you didn't do as good of a job as you thought. Maybe your wife is right about how little you help around the house. Maybe you do owe someone an apology. Maybe you do need to go to confession more often. You'll never regret being humble enough to sit with the discomfort and let it point you to the truth. Because truth always points us to Jesus.

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Dominick Albano is a Catholic speaker, author, and consultant who helps parishes deepen their evangelization efforts. Known for his energy, humor, and exceptional storytelling, Dominick combines relatable stories with timeless Catholic truth in ways that are both understandable and encouraging, leaving audiences with practical takeaways they can immediately apply to their daily lives.

His journey began after a powerful conversion in high school. At sixteen, he gave his first retreat talk, and has since spoken at hundreds of parish missions, youth conferences, men's conferences, Legatus dinners, and retreats across the country. His ability to meet people where they are has made him a sought-after speaker for Catholics of all ages.

Dominick is the author of several books, including *The Fundamental Theory of Happiness: How to Find Your Purpose and Be More Joyful* (Ascension), a finalist for the 2021 Association of Catholic Publishers' Excellence in Publishing Awards.

When he isn't on the road speaking, Dominick works with parishes to help maximize their impact in the communities they serve.



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