

We live in an age of Icarus. In ancient Greek mythology, Icarus was the son of Dedalus, a master craftsman who made him a pair of wings from feathers, cloth and beeswax. Dedalus warned his son not to fly too low in case the sea's dampness clog his wings and not too high, in case they melted in the heat of the sun. Alas, Icarus flew too high: the wings melted and he fell into the sea and drowned. This story gave rise to the maxim: 'Don't fly too close to the sun'. It isn't some pagan rubbish – like all the ancient myths, it tells a story to illustrate a deep truth. The Roman writer Sallust said: 'A myth might not have happened, but it is always and everywhere true'. Flying too near the sun is a theme that has always been rooted in the human psyche or soul. It says what Jesus said one-and-a-half thousand years later: 'He who exalts himself will be humbled'. The Book of Proverbs puts it this way: 'Pride comes before a fall'. It is *hubris* and *nemesis*: arrogance and punishment.

We live in an age of Icarus because in weapons of warfare and dreams of conquest, we are flying too close to the sun; in science and technology – which gives facts but not meaning – we are flying too close to the sun; in abandoning the age-old wisdom that has shaped human society, we are doing exactly the same thing. We now have the capability to destroy the world a hundred times over; we can fiddle about the human DNA substantially enough to clone another Mozart – or, catastrophically, another Stalin. We can decide, at a ridiculously young age – and are encouraged to do so – whether we want to

be male, female or in between. All this is flying too close to the sun.

What is missing in our age is humility and an awareness of our limitations – contemporary culture seems to have no idea that limitations are naturally there for our own sake. Any parent who has had to say ‘no’ to a son or daughter who wants to go out and stay out late, will know this. Limitations are not there out of severity, but love.

What is missing in our age is modesty. Look around: in nearly every sphere of life modesty is seen as eccentric, weak, foolish, crazy. How will you ever get on *Britain’s Got Talent* or be an influencer if you’re *modest*, for God’s sake? Our world turns on the ruthless promotion of oneself.

Yet in ancient Greece and with the Judeo-Christian tradition, modesty was always considered a virtue. Unfortunately, it was also applied almost exclusively to the character and appearance of women: cover yourself up, keep your eyes to yourself, speak when you’re spoken to, and know your place. But this is a ridiculous travesty, a distortion. Modesty and humility are twins. They prevent extremism of any kind – religious, political or scientific. Above all, Jesus loved the modest and the humble – he praised them in his teachings and stories – and that’s enough to want to be like them.