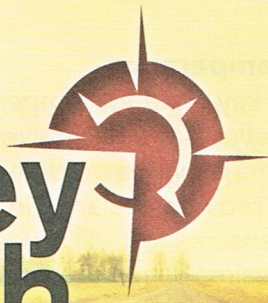


# Journey of Faith



## In Short:



- God's ways are manifested in the lives of those who practice the virtues.
- There are both human virtues and theological virtues.
- The greatest of the virtues is love (charity), which orders all the other virtues.

A virtue is a good habit, an ongoing "and firm disposition to do the good" (CCC 1803).

*"Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith."*

Hebrews 12:1–2

## Living the Virtues

Habits are patterns of behavior or thought. We're all too familiar with bad habits; we may even call them vices. **Virtues** are nurtured attitudes and efforts to do good and give the best of ourselves. They aren't merit badges to be earned and worn to prove our goodness. Rather, they're dispositions that shape us into the people God created us to be.

*"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."*

Philippians 4:8

Virtuous people freely choose to cooperate with the grace of God. Catholic Tradition distinguishes between human, also known as moral or cardinal, virtues and theological virtues. **Human virtues** are acquired through our human efforts. They "govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct" (CCC 1804). **Theological virtues** are gifts from God, who is "their origin, motive, and object" (CCC 1812). Both the human and theological virtues are characteristics of followers of Christ.

## The Human (Moral or Cardinal) Virtues

### Prudence

The prudent person examines a situation closely, considers all options, and chooses the option that leads toward the greatest good.

Sometimes people mistake prudence for excessive caution or restraint. However, the prudent person is prepared to make the right decision when the time arrives. Furthermore, prudence is judged not simply on whether the action produces some good (the end) but also whether that choice, in its whole context (including the means), is the best possible action.

Prudence guides and steers the other virtues by setting boundaries and standards that lead to right judgment.

### Justice

Justice is right action or right relationship. It directs us to consistently and firmly give what's due to God and neighbor. There will always be some inequality, inconsistency, or disharmony in our human relationships. Perfect justice will come from God at the Final Judgment.

Some people think being just means giving the same to everyone, dividing things equally. Others think justice means giving people what they've earned. Payment based on merit is appropriate, yet Jesus told a parable of a vineyard owner who went out at five different times of day to hire workers. At the end of the day, he paid all the workers a full day's wage. The workers who had worked all day were outraged to receive the same daily wage as those who had worked less. They couldn't comprehend a master who responded with generosity, a generosity that goes beyond mere recompense (see Matthew 20:1-16).

- When has one of your children (or a sibling) needed something different than the other children?
- When have you felt that your employer was unfair to you when dealing with a fellow employee? Is it possible the appearance of favoritism was a matter of meeting the needs of an employee in a unique way?



### Fortitude

Fortitude enables us to endure difficulties in our pursuit of the good with courage and purpose. While prudence and justice guide the reasoning process, fortitude and temperance help us follow through.

Fear or self-doubt may tempt us to abandon action, our family might oppose our commitment to social justice, or peer pressure can sway us from choosing what's right. In all instances, however, the person of fortitude will persist in pursuing the good.

- When have you been tempted to choose poorly because of fear or peer pressure?



### Temperance

A key word for temperance is *balance*. Temperance deflects the excessive attraction of human pleasures and provides moderation in exercising one's passion. It provides balance in the use of goods and gifts and "ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable" (CCC 1809).

Temperance asks us to measure carefully our use of created goods, not to avoid them entirely. The Gospel calls us to the reasonable use of material goods, money in particular. A lack of balance often leads to consumerism, materialism, and amassing possessions while missing life's deeper purpose.

Understanding temperance as moderation or balance is especially important when we're dealing with emotions, which are critical in the moral life. They spark the initial movement toward the good. Yet, they must be measured, channeled, and ordered toward the good.

- Name a temptation or challenge you face regularly. What is a small step you can take to reduce its power over you?



### The Theological Virtues

The theological virtues originate in God, are effective under his direction, and have him as their destiny. Authentic human good and union with God go together. We can experience a degree of contentment in this life, but genuine happiness comes through union with God.

The journey toward union with God can't be made on human effort alone. The virtues help us find our way home to the Father, but we'll continue to bump up against the limits of human frailty and sin. Faith, hope, and charity move us out of ourselves and help us grow in holiness and practice the moral virtues.

*"To ask about the good...ultimately means to turn towards God, the fullness of goodness."*

*Pope St. John Paul II, The Splendor of Truth, 9*

## Faith

Faith enables us to believe in God and hold as true all that he has revealed. It allows us to acknowledge God's existence and fall in love with God who first loved us.

As a gift, faith must be received and nurtured. No one becomes faith-filled upon acknowledging God's existence or reciting a creed. Since faith is about friendship with God, it's sustained and strengthened in proportion to our efforts to build personal relationship with God. Faith grows as we make time for Christ and as we encounter the community of believers who make up the Church.



There are two main consequences of faith:

- *A good moral life.* Our image of God is false if we think we can believe in God and not have concern for others. There's a necessary link between believing in God and right moral action.
- *A spirit of evangelization.* It's difficult to keep good news to ourselves. We want to share good news so that others may share our joy. The same dynamic is at work within the faithful. They share the good news of salvation in Christ with others.

Faith prompts not only a spirit of humility and gratitude but also of determination to become who God has created us to be.

- *What impact has your growing faith had on your life so far?*



## Hope

Hope is born of confidence in God's presence and activity in the world. Hope instills a joyful longing for the coming of God's kingdom. Hope that God will bring to completion the good work begun in us helps us to courageously pursue the good.



*"[Hope] keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity."*

CCC 1818

## Charity (Love)

Charity is "the source and the goal of [our] Christian practice" (CCC 1827). Created from Love itself, we are made for love. It orders all the other virtues because it's the goal toward which they all strive. Charity involves receiving God's love into our hearts and loving God and neighbor in response.



Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote that to love someone is to make their loves and concerns our own. Jesus says, "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (John 13:34). With so many contemporary notions of love, the witness and love of Jesus provides the reference point for the way we are to love. The Lord asks us to love "even our enemies, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself" (CCC 1825).

*"So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."*

1 Corinthians 13:13

## Practicing the Virtues

Living the virtues means practicing the **Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy**.

### Corporal Works of Mercy

- Feed the hungry.
- Give drink to the thirsty.
- Clothe the naked.
- Shelter the homeless.
- Visit the sick.
- Visit the imprisoned.
- Bury the dead.

### Spiritual Works of Mercy

- Instruct the ignorant.
- Counsel the doubtful.
- Admonish the sinner.
- Bear wrongs patiently.
- Forgive offenses willingly.
- Comfort the afflicted.
- Pray for the living and the dead.



- How do/can I model or reflect the virtues in my life?
- Which of the works of mercy is calling me to action?

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