

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- We see God's ways in the lives of those who practices the virtues.
- There are both human and theological virtues.
- The greatest of the virtues is love (charity).



**Human virtues**, in cooperation with the daily graces given to us by God, are acquired through our own efforts, actions, and habits. They "govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct" (CCC 1804). **Theological virtues** are a gift from God and are divine in origin. Both types of virtues help identify and define us as Christian disciples.

## Living the Virtues

We all have bad habits, sometimes we call them our "vices," but we rarely take time to think about our good habits, our "virtues." **Virtues** are those behaviors that make knowing what is good easy. They aren't merit badges that prove how good we are or how much more virtuous we are than someone else. They're ways of looking at and acting in life that shape us into the image and likeness of God.

*"[Virtue] allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions."*

CCC 1768

We have been given the special freedom to shape our lives in accordance with God's plan for us—or not. When we act virtuously we're cooperating with God's grace. Catholic teaching distinguishes virtues by two categories. Human virtues, also known as the moral or cardinal virtues, and theological virtues.

- Do you think it's possible to live a truly Christian life with only one type of virtue? Why or why not?
- How might human and theological virtues work together toward the same goal (living like Christ)?



## The Human (Moral or Cardinal) Virtues

### Prudence

Prudence guides the other virtues by setting boundaries and standards. It guides us to a right judgment. When we act with prudence we:

- examine the situation.
- compare all options and determine which one tends toward the greatest good.
- work to accomplish what has to be done.

Sometimes people mistake prudence for excessive caution or restraint. However, the prudent person is prepared to make the right decision when the time arrives. Prudence is judged not simply on whether the action produces some good (the ends) but also whether that choice (the means), is the best action tending toward the good.

- *What big decisions am I faced with? How can prudence help me make a decision?*



## Justice

Justice is right action or right relationship. In this world, there will always be inequality, inconsistency, or disharmony among people. Perfect justice will come at the final judgment and only from God. However, the virtue of justice directs us to act with fairness toward God and our neighbor consistently and without hesitation.

When we act with justice we:

- consider the real (not just presumed) needs of others.
- take the situation into account before we act.
- take the time to get to know others as individuals.

Sometimes people think being just means giving everyone the same thing. But each individual has unique needs. For example, a parent has two children, one who needs glasses and one who has perfect, 20/20 vision. Is the parent being just by saying either both children get glasses or neither child gets glasses? Is the right action in this case different for each child?

When we act with justice, it is also important to remember Jesus' mercy. While payment and recognition based on merit is appropriate, think about the parable of the vineyard owner and workers (Matthew 20:1–16). He hired workers at various times in the day, but paid them all a full day's wages. While there is a "just wage," Jesus wants us to act not just with earthly justice, but with generosity which considers acts of compassion and mercy beyond what is simply the letter of the law.

- *Have you ever been in a situation where you needed something different than those around you (classmates, friends, siblings)?*



Read the full parable of the workers (Matthew 20:1–16).

- *How would you feel if you had been working all day? Only a few hours? How do you see justice at work in this parable?*

## Fortitude

Have you ever seen *The Wizard of Oz*? The Cowardly Lion's mission was to ask for courage. What he found on the way was a series of difficult and challenging situations where he had to forge ahead in the face of adversity. When he finally made it to Oz, he realized that he had become courageous on his own through his perseverance.

We act with fortitude when we:

- pursue good even when it's difficult.
- endure difficulties courageously and with purpose.
- continue to pursue good even when it requires sacrifice.

While prudence and justice guide our reasoning and choices, fortitude and temperance help us follow through. Fear or self-doubt may tempt us to abandon action. Peer pressure may sway us from choosing what is good. The person with fortitude will carry on.

- *Are you ever tempted to make decisions out of fear or pressure from others?*



- *How do you stand firm in your beliefs?*

## Temperance

The key word for temperance is balance. Temperance counteracts the temptations of excessive pleasures and provides moderation in exercising our passions. It "ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable" (CCC 1809).

We act with temperance when we:

- carefully measure our use of created goods.
- measure, channel, and order our emotions toward good.
- eat and drink in moderation according to our needs.

Many people equate temperance with abstinence, but except in cases of addiction, where moderation isn't possible, that's not true. Temperance asks us to measure carefully our use of created goods, not

to avoid them entirely. A lack of balance often leads to consumerism, materialism, and amassing things while missing the deeper purpose of our lives.

Moderation or balance is especially important when we're dealing with emotions, which are critical in our moral lives. They spark the initial movement toward the good. Yet, they must be measured, channeled, and ordered toward the good continuously.

- *Is there something you struggle to moderate in your own life?*
- *What small step can you take toward tempering this habit?*



## The Theological Virtues

*"The theological virtues relate directly to God. They dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive, and object."*

CCC 1812

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 only find genuine happiness and fulfillment through union with the Triune God.

This union can't happen through our efforts alone, we will always find limits due to human frailty and sin. Faith, hope, and charity move us out of ourselves and help us grow in holiness.

### Faith

Faith enables us to believe in God and in all he has revealed. It allows us to accept his presence and, more importantly, to fall in love with the God who first loved us.

Although faith is a gift, it must also be received and nurtured. No one becomes faith-filled by simply acknowledging God's existence or reciting a creed. Since faith is about friendship with God, it is sustained and strengthened in opportunities to get to know God. We can't become friends with someone we never spend time with. It's the same with faith. We can't grow in faith if we never let God into our lives. Faith comes in and through a community of believers—the Church.

There are two main outcomes of living with faith:

- *A good moral life.* We can't 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.* Consider how difficult it is to keep good news to yourself. Think of how excitedly we tell others about the things we love. Instinctively, we want to tell the whole world. We share good things because we want others to share our joy. The same is true for faith.

Faith nurtures a spirit of humility, gratitude, and determination to become who God has created us to be. It reminds us that God is greater than we are and always at work, even capable of bringing good out of evil. It frees us to bring about goodness in the world.

- *What impact has your relationship with God had on your life so far?*



### Hope

*"[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

Hope comes from our confidence in God's presence and activity in our world. Hope means that we have a joyful longing for the coming of God's kingdom, when all the forces of evil will be banished. We don't wonder if God's kingdom will come, but when.

We see hope at work particularly in the expression of courage. Pursuing good in the face of adversity is difficult. Courage is grounded in the hope that God will bring to completion the good work begun in us.

- *How does your hope for God's kingdom give you courage as you live your faith?*



## Charity (Love)

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

Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote that to love someone is to make their loves, their concerns, our own. Jesus says, “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (John 13:34). With so many cultural notions of love, the witness 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).

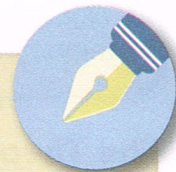
- How do you express love in your own life?



With a partner or on your own, list one way you see this virtue in action in the world and one way you can actively live this virtue in your own life.

- Prudence
- Justice
- Fortitude
- Temperance
- Faith
- Hope
- Charity (Love)

Is there a virtue you struggle with? Why might you be having trouble with it? As you reflect, think about ways you can take steps toward making this virtue stronger and write them down.



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