

THE VIRTUE OF FORTITUDE

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In the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

In today's meditation, we want to pray with Our Lord about the virtue of fortitude. Fortitude is that virtue which allows us to overcome difficulties when we need to achieve the good. It is about achieving the difficult good, and for that we need a virtue because so many times we are attacked by fear and we cannot really overcome the obstacles that are presented to us without this inner strength, which is really this virtue of fortitude or courage. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, "The task of the virtue of fortitude is to remove the hindrance which holds back the will from following reason." And this could be done in the natural plane, just in the human plane, or it could also be a supernatural virtue when it's about reason enlightened by faith.

And it could even be something bigger than a supernatural virtue which is the gift of the Holy Spirit called courage, and that's when we are so docile to the Holy Spirit that we are able to do things that go beyond our strength to be able to accomplish. The extreme example of this, I think, is dying for the faith. The Lord on the Cross is, by far, the greatest example of fortitude that we all have. The difficult good is therefore not just any good when we're talking about the gift of the Holy Spirit or the supernatural virtue of fortitude, it is a supernatural good. It is the good of souls. It is the good that that brings people to salvation.

The Apostles themselves actually inspire us when we look at their own trajectory of virtue, their own difficulties, because didn't the Apostles run away from the Cross? Yes, they did, everyone except John. They all ran away, they all left Jesus in Gethsemane because they were afraid. They had really instinctively just put their own earthly life above- above Jesus, above God. And yet, they would come back because it says in the Acts of the Apostles, after they received the Holy Spirit, that the Apostles persevered in the teachings of the Apostles and in the breaking of the bread, meaning the Mass. They persevered in the faith but before they had run away because they didn't really move, or act, or think in the plane of faith, they were always looking at things from the human point of view. And the the greatest good we have from the human point of view is our own physical life. But there are times where we can even give our physical life for something greater.

The Apostles, when we look at them, are disunited. They're always talking about who is the greatest. They're always bickering about what place they hold in the ranking of the Apostles, perhaps. And that's almost like a pastime, that Our Lord kind of catches them off and on. And yet, after the Holy Spirit comes, they are one heart and one soul, as St. Luke's says in the Acts of the Apostles. Even though they may have been confused as to what should be the attitude towards Christians who were converts from paganism, whether they should follow the old law or not, and there was much discussion about that, and perhaps a little bit of disunity. When they actually pray and come together in the First Council, the Council of Jerusalem, as it's related in the Acts of the Apostles, they come to a united conclusion and resolution and they say, the Holy Spirit and we have decided, and then they write a letter to the early Christians giving them instructions as to the implications of that decision. So, somehow the Apostles, who were just totally disunited are now united, and that takes fortitude, it takes strength, it takes the Holy Spirit, sometimes, if not all the time.

When Our Lord announces the Cross, that he must suffer, that he must be betrayed, the Apostles, or at least St. Peter, says, "Far be it from you, Lord, far be it from you." For which he gets the correction of Our Lord, "Get behind me, Satan, for you do not mind the things of God, but those of men." That's a strong correction, but it's certainly in Our Lord's judgment, which is infallible, was deserved because Peter was running away already in his mind from the Cross, even before he had come close to suffering anything. And Our Lord is so vehement about his mission, he's so focused on his mission, that he will even go as far as to call Peter, Satan, in order to get that temptation away from him.

This is what we see when we have the virtue of fortitude, that we are focused on the difficult good, and the difficult good is- is overcome with- with courage. Peter would eventually receive that courage that he did not have for so many times that we see in the gospel, but he would receive it after the Holy Spirit came. And- and we see that because he and St. John, when they are arrested and then they are let go, and after having been scourged by the authorities for having spoken in the name of Jesus, the Acts of the Apostles says, "They rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer some disgrace for the name, the name of Jesus." It really is an incredible thing how, when the Holy Spirit takes over, this gift of courage, or this supernatural virtue of courage, is- operates at another level than just the mere natural virtue. That's why St. Peter would eventually write these words, "Beloved, do not be startled at the trial by fire that is taking place among you to prove you, to test you, as if something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are partakers of the sufferings of Christ, that you may also rejoice with exultation in the revelation of his glory. If you are upbraided for the name of Christ, blessed will you be because the honor, the glory, and the power of God and his Spirit rests upon you. Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or a slanderer or as one coveting what belongs to others. But if he suffers as a Christian, let him not be

ashamed but let him glorify God under this name, for the time has come for the judgment to begin with the household of God.”

Well, here St. Peter in his first letter is telling us his own experience because he suffered as a Christian, he suffered for the name of Christ. And, I mean, suffering is not something we look for, but when it comes, we certainly- we'll have what it takes in order to not get bogged down by it. That's why, when we look at the virtue of fortitude, we can look at several aspects of it. One is that it's not enough for us to be desirous of doing the good, that's not enough. We need to actually have the strength to be able to achieve it. And that's why St. Augustine says, "There are men who want to live a good life." How many of us want to live a good life? I mean, there's plenty of people with good desires, right? In our- in our own experience, hopefully, and I'm sure there's plenty of people that don't want to live a good life, but let's give people the benefit of the doubt. Yes, they want to live a good life, and we know many good people. And Augustine continues, "And they have already decided to do so. But they are not capable of bearing sufferings even though they are ready to do the good." And then he adds, "Now it is part of the Christian's strength not only to do good works but also to endure evil. Weak men are those who appear to be zealous in doing good works but are unwilling or unable to endure the sufferings that threaten. Lovers of the world, however, who are kept from good works by some evil desire lie sick and listless, and it is this sickness that deprives them of any strength to accomplish good works.”

So, certainly, to be a lover of the world and not wanting to do the good is- is not the level we want to be at. But even if we want to do the good, which is already a lot, that's not enough. We need the strength to be able to suffer evil and not be just weak persons who, you know, as soon as the difficulties come, we cave in. Think of the parable of the sower of Our Lord, when he says some of the seed falls on thorns and thistles, or when they- when the thorns grow up and th-e along with the- with the wheat, you know, the whole thing is choked. And- and he says, when he interprets that parable he says, those thorns and thistles, that's the love of the world, that somehow takes us away from the good of the gospel that we kind of had conceived in our soul and was growing, but there's so much temptation out there, there's so much evil that- that is threatening us and we so readily give up.

That's why the virtue fortitude regulates anger, the passion of anger, and fear. Think of anger... anger is- is that passion which is neither good nor bad in itself, but we need to find the right balance and the right balance is hard to achieve unless we have fortitude that works with., as we saw already with the virtue of prudence, that works with right reason applied to action, which is the virtue of prudence. We need to know how angry to be and how angry not to be sometimes. Our Lord was angry, and it's not bad at the temple when people were- were exchanging commodities there and money, and making money at the temple and he had to kick them out. So, too much anger, for

instance, well, we lack charity if we have too much anger, so we need charity to regulate our anger and not be so angry even if it's righteous- for a righteous cause, you know, that we give into bitter zeal or something like that. So, we cannot be too angry that we lack charity nor have too little anger and allow for evil to persist when- when it is up to us to actually do something about it. We need to muster up the strength, so to speak, or muster up the the passion to say no, I'm not going to let evil, do this, especially when there's maybe third parties involved, you know, when there's injustice being committed, I have to do something about it or whatever. And that requires courage, though, our strength.

At the same time, fear, we have fear. If you think of- having fear or anger is not the problem. The- the- the issue is whether we have the right fortitude that- that comes with it, right. We can be fearful of something, but if we're too fearful of- of a certain situation, then we're stymied and we can't make a decision, we're kind of stuck and we can't move. And- and then a lot of, you know, decisions can't be made.

I was once climbing a mountain, and we- we were almost vertical, hanging on a rope. And it was- we were ten on a rope, climbing a mountain way up there in the Alps. And- and one of the people in front of me looked down and he just gave in to fear and he couldn't move. He wouldn't move, he wouldn't move. So all the ten- the ten or the nine others who were on the same rope, we were kind of yelling and screaming at him saying, no, it's okay, it's okay, don't worry about it. And, well, that was a very difficult situation, right. If one person is stymied with fear and they don't want to move and we're on the same rope, well that's- there's a difficulty there. And it was snowing and there was ice all over the place and, you know, I mean, there were reasons to be fearful, but the worst thing was not to do anything, or to do nothing and get stuck there in the ice. No, we have to do something. Anyway, he came out of it and then we're all able to go up, but that was a a moment of, well, there was not- not the greatest moment there, right. Now, if we have too little fear, if our fear is- is- is hardly there for an obstacle, we may- we may actually be reckless, you know, we may not perceive the danger that is actually necessary in order for prudence to be able to dictate what the right action should be, you know. So, we need- we need to find that right balance, and fortitude finds the right balance with prudence. That's why all these virtues work together.

As I was saying, the extreme example of fortitude that we have to look at is Our Lord on the Cross. He perseveres to the end. He- he doesn't complain, he forgives. He is really, we can say, patient, and patience- we have the expression in English, *patience is a virtue*. Patience is a virtue under fortitude. It's part of fortitude. And it's, I would say, a great part of what- it allows us to actually coexist with pain with suffering, with a certain evil and not giving in, not losing our reason, not losing our faith, not losing our peace, you know. So, patience is actually all of a sudden not such a small virtue. Look at what St. Gregory the Great says. He says- he says to the impatient, he says, "What should we tell

the impatient? So the impatient should be told that when carried headlong by the impulse of emotion, they act in some ways as though besides themselves and are hardly aware afterwards of the evil they have done. And while they offer no resistance to their perturbation, they bring into confusion even things that may have been done well when the mind was calm and overthrow under sudden impulse whatever they have happily. And whatever they have done well and- and built with provident toil, for the very virtue of charity which is the mothering guardian of all virtues is lost through the virtue- through- I'm sorry, through the vice of impatience. For it is written, 'charity is patient' in St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. Wherefore," Gregory continues, "where patience is not, charity is not. Through this vice of impatience too, instruction, the nurse of all virtues is dissipated. For it is written, the instruction of a man is known by his patience. Every man then is shown to be by so much less instructed as he is convicted of being less patient, for neither can he truly impart what is good through instruction if in his life he knows not how to bear what is evil in others with equanimity."

Wow, there's- there's a lot here, you know. Patience allows us to have charity, and when we are impatient, we can even destroy that which we have toiled so much to build, and then we just get rid of it really quickly because we're impatient, and then it all falls apart. And also, we cannot be instructed because we need patience to actually learn something, and we cannot teach others because we need patience for them to learn. So, patience is- is a very, very important virtue under fortitude. It really is a manifestation. We can think of fortitude as having two aspects, two manifestations. One is suffering attack without our budging, and that's, I think, what we're talking about when we talk about patience, you know. And think of- think of peer pressure at work or at school, think of our emotions. When we get too emotional, as St. Gregory the Great says, we may lose our- our fortitude or we may lose the focus on the good, we may get too discouraged, you know, all of a sudden because of fear or maybe because of our experience of failure, you know.

I read an article in the newspaper, in the Wall Street Journal, where it talked about Teddy Roosevelt giving a speech called the- I believe it was called the Citizen in a Republic speech, but then it was later known as the, I believe the Arena Speech or Choose the Arena Speech, something like that. The point is that the- he says, "If one fails, at least he fails while daring greatly so that his place shall never be with those cold or timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat." If a person fails, at least he fails while daring greatly so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls, basically fearful souls, who know neither victory nor defeat. It's better to have been defeated because we tried rather than to have never tried, you know. And that takes courage in order to simply try. And, and if we- if we try, actually, we can choose the arena in which we- we- we compete. And if the arena is- is one of those great arenas or the challenge is great, then our defeat will actually not be so discouraging because we will have been defeated by- by a great challenge which is something we can learn from.

I think right now we have to look at that when- when the times we live in are filled with crises and maybe even the things going on in the world and in the Church and in our own families or whatever kind of make us give in to sadness or discouragement. But we have to know, as St. Josemaria taught us so many times, these weren't crises or crises of saints. We are in the big arena. So, if we are defeated, if we are slandered, if we are upbraided, as St. Peter says in his Letter, if we suffer as Christians, let us not be ashamed but let us glorify God under this name, you know. And he continues, "For the time has come for the judgment to begin with the household of God." We are- we are the ones, yes, we will be targeted, just like Jesus. How could you know the disciple be greater than his master? He's not, she's not. We're going to go through the same thing.

In- speaking of all these crises that we have in the- in the Church, St. Josemaria, went through very similar times. And there were times in the 70s, I think, I have here a- a note from one of his- his write- either writings or get-togethers from November 26, 1970 where he was so saddened by what was happening in the Church that he says, "Yesterday, I could not pray two Hail Marys in a row with attention. If you could see how I suffered. But as always, even though it was difficult for me, and I did not know how to do it, I continued to pray. Lord, help me, I told him. You must be the one to carry out the great things that you have entrusted to me because you already realize that I am not capable of doing even the smallest things. I place myself as always in your hands." And he went through a period of dryness in these very difficult moments and he was not even able to pray, you know, something simple.

He says on another occasion, "Dry, my children- this is my present situation. The Lord sustains me from a sack of filth. I continually seek union with God and the Lord gives me great peace and serenity, but I feel dry in prayer, even in vocal prayer. There are days when I can't even get my head into a Hail Mary. I get distracted immediately, but I go on and on, always struggling. I never stopped praying what I have to pray. I pray, I pray, always. I try to fulfill it with all my love, taking advantage of the circumstances in which I find myself. Right now, I am making the resolution to pray the Rosary well this evening." And he goes on. These are- these are moments in- there are moments in our lives when we- just because we- we are- we are going through a difficult time with someone in our household, maybe a broken relationship, maybe something that is difficult at work, we got into a little fight with our boss, or maybe we lost our job right before the holidays, or something like that- whatever it is, we can hardly pray. We can hardly pray. And these are difficult things, right? How do we confront these difficulties? How do we put food on the table? How do we get our job back? How do we get a new job? How do we reconcile with someone? Whatever the case may be, those are difficult things. But it is the virtue of fortitude that allows us to keep on going, and that's also faith. Faith- faith, the virtue of patience... we need patience as- as we were talking about before.

St. Cyprian actually comments that, about this virtue, that “patience,” or we can add fortitude, “makes us valuable and keeps us for God. Patience tempers anger, controls the tongue, governs thought, keeps peace, regulates the norms of life, breaks the onrush of concupiscence, represses the violence of pride, puts off the fire of hatred. It makes us humble in prosperity, strong in adversity, meek against insults and moral damages. It teaches us to pardon immediately those who commit transgressions and to pray fervently at length for him who has been at fault. Patience conquers temptations, bears tribulations and martyrdoms to the end. It gives our faith the firmest foundation. It sees our hope grow to maturity. It directs our actions so that we stay in the path of Christ as we advance with his help. Finally, it is what makes us persevere as children of God.”

I- I think I mentioned earlier that there were two manifestations of fortitude. And I mentioned suffering attack without budging was one of them, but the second one is- here, it's a sustained attack like a soldier, like an athlete that perseveres to the end. That's- that's also what will happen when we embrace the- and we grow in the virtue of fortitude.

Let us turn to Our Lady who precisely persevered to the end because she let love conquer her entire life through and through, and that's why she was able to be at the foot of the Cross persevering to the end. Let us ask her to give us the same kind of strength so that we too may face any difficulty with the Holy Spirit together, looking at Jesus on the Cross, and actually knowing with true faith, with a strong faith, that it is all for the good that we could be redeeming with Our Lord all of mankind.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations which you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help to put them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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