

Session 29: Virtue

HYMN: Ye Sons and Daughters



Ye sons and daughters, let us sing!
 The King of Heaven, our glorious
 King
 from death today rose triumphing.
 Alleluia!
 Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!

That Easter morn, at break of day,
 the faithful women went their way
 to seek the tomb where Jesus lay.
 Alleluia!
 Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!

An angel clothed in white they see,
 who sat and spoke unto the three:
 "Your Lord has gone to Galilee."
 Alleluia!
 Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!

That night th'apostles met in fear,
 and Christ did in their midst
 appear,
 and said, "My peace be with you
 here."
 Alleluia!
 Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!

How blest are they who have not
 seen,
 and yet whose faith has constant
 been,
 for they eternal life shall win.
 Alleluia!
 Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!

On this most holy day of days,
 to God our hearts we gladly raise
 in thanks, and jubilee, and praise.
 Alleluia!
 Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!

PRAYER:

Let us pray:
 God, our Father,
 look upon us with love.
 You redeemed us
 and made us Your children in Christ.
 Give us true freedom

and bring us to the inheritance
 You promised.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
 Your Son,
 Who lives and reigns with You
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 God, for ever and ever.
 — Amen

READING: Lk 8:4-8,11-15

The Lord be with you.

— *And with your spirit*

A Reading from the holy Gospel
 according to Luke

— *Glory to You, O Lord*

Jesus spoke to them in a parable.

"A sower went out to sow his seed.

"And as he sowed,

some seed fell on the path

and was trampled,

and the birds of the sky ate it up.

"Some seed fell on rocky ground,

and when it grew,

it withered for lack of moisture.

"Some seed fell among thorns,

and the thorns grew with it

and choked it.

"And some seed fell on good soil,

and when it grew,

it produced fruit a hundredfold."

After saying this,

He called out,

"Whoever has ears to hear

ought to hear."

Then His disciples asked Him
 what the meaning of this parable
 might be.

He answered,

"This is the meaning of the parable.

The seed is the word of God.

"Those on the path

are the ones who have heard,

but the devil comes

and takes away the word

from their hearts

that they may not believe

and be saved.

"Those on rocky ground

are the ones who,

when they hear,

receive the word with joy,

but they have no root;

they believe only for a time

and fall away in time of trial. —

"As for the seed
that fell among thorns,
they are the ones who have heard,
but as they go along,
they are choked
by the anxieties and riches
and pleasures of life,
and they fail
to produce mature fruit.

"But as for the seed
that fell on rich soil,
they are the ones who,
when they have heard the word,
embrace it
with a generous and good heart,
and bear fruit
through perseverance."
The Gospel of the Lord
— *Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ*

IN BRIEF: WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

Briefly, a virtue is a good habit.

The cardinal virtues
are prudence, justice,
fortitude, and temperance.
They are called "cardinal"
because they can be seen
as the hinges on which
all other moral virtues turn.

The virtues which are opposed
to the seven capital sins
(in order) are humility,
liberality (or generosity),
chastity, meekness, temperance,
brotherly love, and diligence.

The virtue of detachment is
freedom from unhealthy attachment
to earthly goods.

The three theological virtues
are faith, hope, and charity.
They are called "theological"
because they relate to God
directly.

Faith is God's supernatural gift
which enables us to believe
without doubting
whatever God has revealed.

Faith alone will not save us
without good deeds:
we must also have hope and charity.

Hope, or trust, is
the supernatural gift of God
by which we firmly trust
that God will give us eternal life

and all the means necessary
to obtain it,
if we do what He requires of us.

Charity is God's supernatural gift
by which we love God
above all things,
and our neighbour as ourselves
for God's sake.

The principal virtues
we learn by imitating our Lord
are meekness, humility,
and obedience.

Jesus said,
"If any man will come after Me,
let him deny himself,
and take up his cross daily,
and follow Me."

BIBLE READING

Lk 1-10

This week,
in your Bible reading,
you will begin the Gospel of Luke
and see how Peter, James, and John,
after the miraculous catch of fish,
"left everything,
and became His followers."

Similarly, when Jesus saw
the tax collector Levi,
who became known as Matthew,
He said, "Follow Me,"
and, "leaving everything behind,
Levi stood up and became His
follower."

As Jesus' followers,
they later "bore witness" to Christ,
not only by their lives,
but also, for all except John,
by their deaths.

Next week we will talk about
"Bearing Witness:
Living as a Catholic."

Virtue

Introduction

After the sadness of Holy Week — Christ's Passion and death — there comes the ecstasy of Easter, a solemnity that lasts a week and a season that lasts for a further six weeks.¹ After that, however, we come back down to earth.

We find this pattern not just in the Church's liturgy,² but all through life. The delights of courtship are followed by the excitement of the wedding and then the joy of the honeymoon, but gradually life returns to normal, or even sinks into staleness and boredom.

How do we cope?

Law of Undulation

C.S. Lewis' fictional book *The Screwtape Letters* is a long correspondence between a retired devil, Screwtape, and his nephew, Wormwood, who is out on his first assignment to damn a human soul.

Wormwood's "patient"³ has, to the dismay of both devils, become a Christian, but Wormwood writes that he "has great hopes" that this "religious phase is dying away."

Screwtape pours cold water on his enthusiasm. "Has no one ever told you about the Law of Undulation?" he asks.

Humans are "amphibian," he explains: both animal and spiritual. "This means that while their spirit can be directed to an eternal object, their bodies, passions, and imaginations are in continuous change," for that is what it means to be subject to time. "Their nearest approach to constancy, therefore, is undulation — the repeated return to a level from which they repeatedly fall back, a series of troughs and peaks."

"If you had watched your patient carefully," Screwtape writes, "you would have seen this undulation in every department of his life — his interest in his work, his affection for his friends, his physical appetites, all go up and down. As long as he lives on earth, periods of emotional and bodily richness and liveliness will alternate with periods of numbness and poverty."

Now God, "in His efforts to get permanent possession of a soul, relies on the troughs even more than on the peaks," Screwtape says; "some of His special favourites have gone through longer and deeper troughs than anyone else."⁴

At the beginning of the Christian life, God may give us "communications of His presence," like "emotional sweetness and easy conquest over temptation."

"But He never allows this state of affairs to last long," Screwtape notes. Sooner or later He withdraws — if not in fact, at least from our conscious experience — "all those supports and incentives." Apparently, He leaves us "to carry out from the will alone duties that have lost all relish."⁵

1 See the talks on "Liturgy: Public Worship" and "The Liturgical Year."

2 See the talks on "Liturgy: Public Worship" and "The Liturgical Year."

3 The man Wormwood is trying to damn.

4 The phenomenon is often called "the dark night of the soul," the title given to a poem by St. John of the Cross, a 16th-century Spanish monk declared "Doctor of the Church" by Pope Pius XI August 24 1926. St. John wrote two book-length commentaries on his poem: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*.

St. Teresa of Kolkata's "dark night of the soul" lasted for decades. "Darkness is such that I really do not see — neither with my mind nor with my reason — The place of God in my soul is blank — There is no God in me — When the pain of longing is so great — I just long and long for God — and then it is that I feel — He does not want me — He is not there" (letter from Teresa to Archbishop Ferdinand Périer SJ of Calcutta August 24 1948, quoted in Father Brian Kolodiejchuk MC: *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: the Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, Introduction). "God seems to hide Himself for a while. That may be painful, and if it lasts long, it becomes a martyrdom. The Little Flower [Thérèse of Lisieux] passed through that, like the great Teresa [of Avila], and, we may say, most, if not all, the saints" (letter from Archbishop Ferdinand Périer SJ of Calcutta to Teresa June 23 1955, quoted in Father Brian Kolodiejchuk MC: *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: the Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, Eight).

5 In Mary Fishback Powers: *Footprints in the Sand*, the poet, looking back over the "footprints" she has left during her life, reproaches God: "I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life, there was only one set of footprints." But God replies, "When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

But it is "during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods," that we grow into the sort of people He wants. For example, "the prayers offered in the state of dryness are those that please Him best."

"Our cause is never more in danger," Screwtape concludes, "than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending," to do God's will, "looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken,⁶ and still obeys."⁷

Good players

Our life on earth is a war with the powers of evil:⁸ "the *world*, the flesh, and the devil."⁹ At the end of each day, we have kept some of God's Commandments and broken others. And we are tempted to think that if we have not broken too many, or not broken them too often, God will give us a compassionate "pass" into Heaven.

But unless we have a certain quality or character, we are not *capable* of living the life of Heaven. In Lewis' analogy, we have to be solid people, not just ghosts, if we are to bear Heaven's light or breathe its air.¹⁰

"In a word," Jesus says, we "must be made perfect" as our "heavenly Father is perfect."¹¹

God is like a hockey coach who is not satisfied with 50% or even 90% success in shots on goal; he wants 100%.

Everything counts

Jesus did not say that we must *be* perfect, as if we have to achieve perfection on our own; He said that we must be *made* perfect, for He will do what is necessary.

If we want, we can stop Him. But if we let Him, He will make us as "perfect with the perfection of grace" — that is, through His graciousness — as His Father is "perfect with the perfection of [His] nature."¹²

How do we "let" Him make us perfect? The answer is that we obey the commandments He "presented" to us "with divine authority" and "definitive interpretation"¹³ right before He summarized them "in a word."¹⁴

That process will go on until we die. We will never be so good that we can afford to break even the least of the commandments, even occasionally.

Some people argue that we need not keep all the commandments all the time as long as we maintain our "fundamental option" for God.¹⁵ For example, some husbands think that "casual" extra-marital affairs do not matter as long they do not divorce their wives; some wives think they can fantasize about other men as long as they do not commit adultery.

But "we do not go to Hell only by being unfaithful to the free self-commitment which we have made to God": we also give up salvation "by any other mortal sin."¹⁶

With every single moral choice we make, we acquire, bit by bit, with God's help, the habits of heavenly creatures, who will be at home in Heaven with God, or hellish creatures, who will spend eternity hating God, their fellow-humans, and themselves.¹⁷

Similarly, every shot at the net reinforces or weakens a hockey player's habit of

6 From the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Ps 22:2).

7 C.S. Lewis: *The Screwtape Letters*, 8

8 See Rv 12:17.

9 See *The Penny Catechism*, 348, and the talk on "Sin and Forgiveness." Recall that "*world*," as opposed to "world," has a negative sense. See the talk on "Sin and Forgiveness."

10 See C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 3. (see the talk on "Supernatural Life.")

11 Mt 5:48

12 Fourth Lateran Council (1215), 1

13 See CCC 582; Mt 5:21-47.

14 Mt 5:48

15 See Pope John Paul II: *Veritatis Splendor*, 65-70.

16 Pope John Paul II: *Veritatis Splendor*, 68

scoring goals. As his eyes and muscles and nerves are conditioned by goal after goal, he becomes a *good player*. Indeed, his body has a certain tone or quality even when he is not playing hockey.

Now the habits we acquire as we repeatedly choose God and reject the *world*, the flesh, and the devil are called *virtues*. Those we acquire as we repeatedly make the opposite choices are called *vices*.

Definitions

"Virtue" comes from the Latin *virtus*, from the Latin *vir* ("man") and *virtus* ("manliness," "bravery," and "courage" as well as "excellence," "worth," and "goodness").

A "virtue" can be defined as "a habitual and firm disposition to do the good,"¹⁸ "a habit or power" which enables us "to perform an action" with ease and competence.¹⁹ The words "habit" and "habitual" are crucial.

For example, in driving a car, the habit of signalling turns and lane changes is a virtue. A "good driver" realizes that the road will be safer if everyone knows as early as possible which way he is going to go, so he maintains the firm intention of signalling. He signals even when it seems unnecessary because his route is obvious or there are no other cars nearby. As a result, he never has to take time to consider, in any particular situation, whether or not to signal; he does it automatically, even in an emergency.

Similarly, in our everyday life, it is a virtue to get out of bed as soon as the alarm goes. We decide the night before, rationally and prudently, what time to get up, and we set our alarm accordingly. Then, the next morning, we do not have to spend time agonizing over whether or not to sleep in: we get up automatically.

"It is a profoundly erroneous truism, repeated by all copy-books and by eminent people when they are making speeches, that we should cultivate the habit of thinking of what we are doing. The precise opposite is the case. Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them."²⁰

In our spiritual life, a virtue is a habit that enables us "to act according to right reason enlightened by faith," making us "a good person."²¹

"The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God."²² A virtuous person "pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions."²³ His virtues are "the fullest expression" of who he is, for they manifest his "precise powers and capabilities."²⁴

Virtues are commonly divided into two groups: human (or moral) and theological (or supernatural).

Human virtues

The human virtues, "acquired by human effort," are formed by, and lead to, morally good acts.²⁵

The *cardinal* human virtues, on which the rest of our moral life hinges or pivots, are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.²⁶ (In Latin, "hinge" is *cardo*, *cardinis*.)

17 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 4.

18 CCC 1803

19 See Our Sunday Visitor's *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

20 Alfred North Whitehead: *An Introduction to Mathematics*, 5

21 John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Virtue"

22 Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, 1

23 CCC 1803

24 See Our Sunday Visitor's *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Virtue." In some contexts, "virtuous" means simply "chaste." "Take her out and enjoy yourself," one man says to another. "She's virtuous, by the way, so don't indulge in any false hopes" (see Agatha Christie: *The Pale Horse*, Chapter 4, 3). Using "virtue" to mean "chastity" and "vice" to mean "lust," Swinburne compares "the lilies and languors of virtue" to "the raptures and roses of vice" (Algernon Swinburne: *Dolores*), but Chesterton replies, "if you think virtue is languor, just try it and see" (G.K. Chesterton: *Dolores Replies to Swinburne*).

25 See CCC 1804.

26 CCC 1805

Speaking of wisdom, Solomon said, "The fruits of her works are virtues; for she teaches moderation" — or temperance — "and prudence, justice, and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful for men than these."²⁷

Prudence

Prudence²⁸ is the habit of discerning our true good in every circumstance and choosing the right means of achieving it.²⁹ It means practical common sense: thinking out in advance what we are going to do and what is likely to come of it.³⁰ "The prudent man looks where he is going."³¹

If we are prudent, we take time before we act, not out of timidity or fear, or because of duplicity (double-dealing) or dissimulation (pretence).³² Rather, we take "counsel carefully," by ourself and with others; make a judgement "on the basis of the evidence at hand"; and direct our activity accordingly.³³

Christ told us to be "like little children":³⁴ simple, single-minded, affectionate, teachable, trusting, and "as innocent as doves."³⁵ However, He also told us to use our intelligence: to be "as clever as snakes."³⁶

For example, charity requires us to give alms, but prudence requires that we consider where our money will end up and how it will be used. Chastity requires that spouses make every marriage act "open to the transmission of life,"³⁷ but prudence requires that they remain aware of the signs of their fertility.³⁸

Justice

Justice is the habit of giving God and neighbour "their due."³⁹

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's,"⁴⁰ Jesus said.

The two are not mutually exclusive. For example, after we finish a meal in a restaurant, we should thank the waiter, the chef, the farmer, the food distributors, etc. However, we should also thank God — for *everything*.

Justice toward God is called the virtue of religion: the habit of adoring Him alone, rejecting both superstition and irreligion.⁴¹

Justice toward our neighbours means respecting their rights and maintaining "the harmony that promotes equity" through the habits of fairness, honesty, give-and-take, truthfulness, and the keeping of promises.⁴²

Fortitude

Fortitude⁴³ is habitual "firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good." It enables us to "conquer fear": to "face trials and persecutions" or even death in a good cause.⁴⁴

It means courage: not just in facing danger, but also in enduring pain, harassment, or temptation.⁴⁵

Temperance

27 Wis 8:7

28 From the Latin *prudencia* ("practical foresight").

29 CCC 1806

30 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 2.

31 Prv 14:15

32 See CCC 1806.

33 See John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Prudence."

34 Mt 18:3

35 Mt 10:16

36 Mt 10:16

37 Pope Paul VI: *Humanae Vitae*, 11

38 See the talk on "God's Will."

39 CCC 1807

40 Mt 22:21

41 See CCC 2095, 2111. Also see the talk on "The First Three Commandments."

42 See the talk on "The Last Seven Commandments."

43 From the Latin *fortis* ("strong," "powerful," "robust," "brave," "courageous," "steadfast").

44 CCC 1808

45 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 2.

Temperance^{4 6} is the habit of maintaining a balance in our use of earthly goods, governing our instincts by our will, and keeping desires within "the limits of what is honourable."^{4 7}

Often called "sobriety" or "moderation," it does not mean avoiding bad things; rather it means using good things as God intended, without giving them too much time or attention. We can be intemperate about anything — drink, golf, motor-cycling, clothes, bridge, sex, eating, talking, or reading.^{4 8}

"Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites."^{4 9} "Live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world."^{5 0}

Humility

Humility is the habit of recognizing the truth about ourselves: that all we have and are is God's gift; that in comparison with God we are nothing; that God loves us because He is love, not because we are lovable; and that He loves everyone, not just us.

It does not mean denying our gifts, like a clever person trying to appear stupid, or undervaluing our blessings, like a pretty girl trying to ignore her beauty. It means admitting that we are indeed *gifted* and *blessed*, but at the same time understanding that those words, even grammatically, point to the Giver and His gift rather than the recipient.

Mary said it perfectly in her *Magnificat*:^{5 1} "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord," for "He has looked upon His servant in her lowliness." "All generations shall call me blessed," for "God Who is mighty has done great things for me."^{5 2}

Humility is the habit of mind that would let us "design the best cathedral in the world, and know it to be the best, and rejoice in that fact," without being any more pleased than if someone else had done it.^{5 3}

God wants to kill our animal self-love: our unjustified bias toward ourself just because it is *ours*. However, when we have learned to love our neighbours as ourselves, He will let us love ourselves as our neighbours^{5 4} — with respect and gratitude for *all* selves.

The vice opposed to humility is *pride*: the state of mind in which I put myself first and centre,^{5 5} as when I jump the line because *I* am in a hurry, or drive as though *my* business is the most important.

Pride is intrinsically anti-God, for God is infinitely superior to us in every way. If we are proud, we look down on others; to see God, we must look up. If we are proud, God *cannot* "do great things" for us, for we will not let Him, and He will never override our free will.^{5 6} Instead, in His mercy, He "deposes the mighty from their thrones" and "sends the rich away empty," for only when we are "lowly" can He "raise us to high places."^{5 7} As Jesus said, "Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, while he who humbles himself shall be exalted."^{5 8}

It is not easy to detect the vice of pride in ourselves. However, pride is naturally competitive,^{5 9} so we can estimate how proud we are by how much we dislike it in

46 From the Latin *temperantia* ("temperance," "moderation," "self-control").

47 CCC 1809

48 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 2.

49 Sir 18:30

50 Ti 2:12

51 Named for its first word in Latin: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* ("My soul magnifies the Lord").

52 See Lk 1:46-55.

53 See C.S. Lewis: *The Screwtape Letters*, 14.

54 See C.S. Lewis: *The Screwtape Letters*, 14.

55 Here we do not mean "pleasure in being praised," as Christ will praise the saved (see Mt 25:21), or "warm-hearted admiration," as when we are "proud" of our children or our country.

56 One could say that confronted with our freedom, God "decided to make Himself 'impotent'" (Pope John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, "Why Does God Tolerate Suffering?").

57 See Lk 1:46-55.

58 See Lk 18:9-14.

59 Other vices can be competitive, but pride is competitive by nature. For example, greed leads us to steal because we want a bigger house or better holidays, but pride leads us to steal just so that we will have more than someone else. Sexual desire leads a man to seduce a woman, but pride leads him to take someone

others. For example, it is because *I* wanted to be the centre of things at the party that I am so annoyed that someone else was.

The first step in acquiring the virtue of humility is to recognize the vice of pride in ourselves. The second is to make a serious effort to obey the moral law; for we find we cannot do it, even for a day, without God's help.⁶⁰

Chastity

In their "original innocence,"⁶¹ Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect internal harmony.⁶² The "mastery over the world that God offered them" was above all "mastery of self."⁶³ However, when they fell, "the control of the soul's spiritual faculties⁶⁴ over the body" was shattered.⁶⁵ Ever since, we have found the sexual instinct extremely difficult to control.

Accordingly, the word "chastity" can suggest "repression, anxiety, fear, and crippling constraint."⁶⁶ However, the Church defines "chastity" as "the integration of sexuality within the person," producing "inner unity" in our "bodily and spiritual being."⁶⁷

Within marriage, the virtue of chastity moderates the desire for legitimate marital acts in accord with the good of the spouses and their family. Outside marriage, it restrains all sexual desires, thoughts, and actions.

"The *world*" and "the devil" combine with "the flesh" to try to persuade us that chastity is perverse and abnormal: that sexual indulgence is an essential part of health, normality, youth, frankness, and good humour. But all this is a lie.

"The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy."⁶⁸ Chastity fosters peace because it "includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery."⁶⁹

Chastity is difficult, but not impossible. With God we can do anything.⁷⁰ God never allows us to be tempted beyond our strength, for He gives us His strength, if we ask Him, and that is sufficient.⁷¹

Only when we habitually give in do temptations against chastity begin to seem unconquerable. For example, if we give in after five minutes, we never find out what it would have been like an hour later. In any case, after each failure, we must ask for forgiveness, pick ourselves up, and try again.⁷²

It may seem that God's help is long in coming, or that we get less than we need, for what God gives us first may be not chastity, but perseverance. Chastity is important, but the habit of appealing to God is more important still:⁷³ it cures us of our illusions about ourselves and teaches us to depend on Him.⁷⁴

* * * * *

else's wife just to prove he is a better man (see C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 8). Women want diamonds because they are beautiful, but pride leads them to wear diamonds just because they are expensive; they would not want them if everyone could afford them.

60 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 8.

61 Pope John Paul II: General Audience, September 12 1979

62 See CCC 374.

63 CCC 377

64 In particular, the psyche, which would have given the sexual instinct a human and not merely animal dimension, and the spirit, which would have given the sexual instinct a supernatural and not merely natural dimension.

65 CCC 400. See the talks on "Creation and the Fall" and "Matrimony." Also See Vincent Hawswell and Maureen Creelman: *Human Sexuality: Its Christian Meaning*, 3, 4.

66 Vincent Hawswell and Maureen Creelman: *Human Sexuality: Its Christian Meaning*, 1

67 CCC 2337. All unchastity violates our integrity. See the talk on "The Last Seven Commandments"; also see Vincent Hawswell and Maureen Creelman: *Human Sexuality: Its Christian Meaning*, 6.

68 CCC 2339. Also see Benedict Groeschel: *The Courage to Be Chaste*.

69 CCC 2339

70 See Mt 19:26.

71 See 2 Cor 12:8-9.

72 See the talk on "Sin and Forgiveness."

73 Similarly, when we exercise on a balance ball, balance is what we are trying for, but it is the *effort* to balance that tones our muscles.

74 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 5.

Truthfulness

Truthfulness is the habit of being "true in deeds and truthful in words," guarding against duplicity (double-dealing), dissimulation (pretence), and hypocrisy.⁷⁵

We talked about it when we studied the Eighth Commandment.⁷⁶

Solidarity⁷⁷

Also called "social charity,"⁷⁸ this virtue is demanded by our human⁷⁹ and Christian⁸⁰ brotherhood: among the poor, between rich and poor, among workers, between employers and employees, among peoples, and among nations.⁸¹ We must practise it in distributing the world's goods, paying people for their work, and resolving socio-economic problems.⁸²

The Catholic Church accepts democracy as the preferred way of conducting political life and safeguarding human rights.⁸³ Otherwise, she does not propose, or express preference for, any specific economic or political system or program, except as it becomes necessary to guard the value of human life or to exercise her ministry in the world.⁸⁴ She reminds us to love our neighbours as ourselves, but it is up to Christian politicians and economists how to put this commandment into action.⁸⁵

However, occasionally, the Church has had to speak out in more detail, and she now has a large body of *social doctrine*.⁸⁶ The earliest example is in the Bible:

- we should work hard, with our own hands, to produce useful goods,⁸⁷ which we should share with the poor.
- if we refuse to work, we should not be fed.⁸⁸
- if we can work, we should help the weak,⁸⁹ especially fellow-Christians.⁹⁰
- we should be allowed to profit from our work.⁹¹
- there should be no busybodies.⁹²
- we should respect those in authority.⁹³

The early Christians sold their property and "shared all things in common."⁹⁴ As the Church grew, this radical form of material communion could not be preserved, but "its essential core" remained.⁹⁵ "The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the word,"⁹⁶ for this "three-fold responsibility" expresses her "deepest nature."⁹⁷

The Church's main task is to distribute spiritual goods;⁹⁸ it is the state's job to

75 See CCC 2468.

76 See the talk on "The Last Seven Commandments."

77 See CCC 1928-1942.

78 See CCC 1939.

79 That is, the fact that we are all of equal worth as human beings. "Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design" (see CCC 1935).

80 That is, the fact that Christians are all one in Christ (see Gal 3:28). Also see the talks on "The Communion Among Christians in the Body of Christ" and "Mary and Joseph."

81 See CCC 1940-1941. Among nations, it is the basis for peace.

82 See CCC 1940.

83 *La Civiltà Cattolica*, June 15 1991. This magazine's editorials are reviewed by the Vatican Secretariat of State before publication. "The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices and guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate" (Pope John Paul II: *Centesimus Annus*, 46).

84 See Pope John Paul II: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41. Also see CCC 2245-2246.

85 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 3.

86 See the Pontifical Council For Justice and Peace: "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church."

87 See Col 3:23-24, 1 Thes 4:11-12. This rules out the "manufacture of silly luxuries and then of sillier advertisements to persuade us to buy them" (C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 3).

88 See 2 Thes 3:10.

89 See Acts 20:35; Eph 4:28.

90 See Gal 16:10.

91 See 1 Cor 9:3-10.

92 See 2 Thes 3:11-12.

93 See Heb 13:17; 1 Pt 2:13.

94 See Acts 2:44-45.

95 See Pope Benedict XVI: *Deus Caritas Est*, 20.

96 Pope Benedict XVI: *Deus Caritas Est*, 22.

97 Pope Benedict XVI: *Deus Caritas Est*, 25.

"guarantee to each person" his share of "the community's goods."⁹⁹ However, "there is no state so just" that it does not need "a service of love." There will always be suffering, loneliness, and material need which cry out for concrete love of neighbour.¹⁰⁰

Detachment

God Himself said that His creation was good,¹⁰¹ and "on many occasions" since, the Church has had to defend its goodness, "including that of the physical world."¹⁰²

We sin not by enjoying this goodness, but by attempting to enjoy it at times, or in ways, that conflict with our enjoyment of greater goods, the chief of which is God Himself.¹⁰³ In fact, all sin "entails an unhealthy attachment"¹⁰⁴ to God's creation in preference to God Himself, from which we must be purified before we can enter Heaven.¹⁰⁵ The opposing virtue is *detachment*, which requires *self-denial*.

"If a man wishes to come after Me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross, and begin to follow in My footsteps,"¹⁰⁶ Jesus said. Self-denial, therefore, "is not optional"; there is no "alternative, self-indulgent way of salvation."¹⁰⁷

We should not be surprised. "Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things" just "to win a crown of leaves that withers"; how much more should we expect to have to "deny ourselves" in order to win "a crown that is imperishable!"¹⁰⁸

Many people think that Christian self-denial is "psychologically sick, world-hating, dour, joyless, and masochistic."¹⁰⁹ No; Christians "sacrifice the best of things not because they think the world is evil and must be put to death, but because they know the world is very good — so good that it can distract us from what's far better": like going to Mass, going to Confession, or going to visit our grandmother in a nursing home.¹¹⁰

The Church helps us cultivate the habit of detachment by commanding us to assume penances like giving up meat on Fridays.¹¹¹ We must also assume voluntary penances like prayer, offerings, sacrifices, works of mercy, and service of neighbour.

However, the best penance is the one God sends us: "the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear."¹¹² Penance helps "configure us to Christ,"¹¹³ reminding us that we will become co-heirs with Him only if we suffer with Him.¹¹⁴

Theological virtues

The theological¹¹⁵ virtues are so called because God is their "origin, motive, and object." That is, they are God's gifts, not the result of human effort;¹¹⁶ they are motivated, or kept alive in us, by God; and they make sense only when they are directed to God. They adapt our faculties to participate in God's nature and dispose us "to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity."¹¹⁷

98 However, in doing so, she has often promoted the development of this world's goods (see CCC 1942).

99 Pope Benedict XVI: *Deus Caritas Est*, 26

100 See Pope Benedict XVI: *Deus Caritas Est*, 28.

101 See Gn 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

102 CCC 299. See Wis 11:24.

103 See Scott Hahn: *Lord, Have Mercy*, 10.

104 CCC 1472

105 Either now, on earth, or after death, in Purgatory (see CCC 1472). Also see the talk on "Death and the End of the World."

106 Mt 16:24. See also Lk 14:27.

107 Scott Hahn: *Lord, Have Mercy*, 10

108 See 1 Cor 9:25.

109 See Scott Hahn: *Lord, Have Mercy*, 10.

110 See Scott Hahn: *Lord, Have Mercy*, 10.

111 See the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Keeping Friday*, September 28 2006. See the talk on "The First Three Commandments."

112 See CCC 1460.

113 CCC 1460

114 See Rom 8:17.

115 From the Greek *Theos* ("God") plus *logos* ("science," "knowledge").

116 In technical language, they are "infused" by God.

117 See CCC 1812.

The theological virtues "are the foundation of Christian moral activity"; they "animate" it and "give life" to the human virtues.¹¹⁸ At the same time, however, we guard God's gift of the theological virtues by practising the human virtues.

There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity.

Faith

"Faith" can mean the content of what we believe, as when the priest says, "Let us stand and profess our faith."¹¹⁹ However, in the present context, it means the virtue, or habit, of belief.

"Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed," Jesus told Thomas.¹²⁰ Now some people think that Jesus was praising belief in general — belief *in anything*. When a friend has cancer, they say, "You must have faith," meaning, "You must believe that God will cure it." But we have no reason for this belief — neither God's promise nor His practice. And to try to believe something of which we are utterly uncertain is not a virtue, but stupidity or dishonesty.¹²¹

By the virtue of faith, we mean the habit of believing all that God has revealed to us, and all that His Holy Church proposes for our belief, because God is truth itself.¹²²

Now from the beginning of this course, we have said, and tried to show, that the belief of mature Christians in God, in Jesus, and in the authority of His Church is rational, based on convincing evidence.¹²³ How, then, can we call faith a virtue, a good habit? Should we not always wait for proof, instead of believing our of habit?

Take a different example. As children, we are told that the human body will float in water and we see people floating, so we believe it. But the first time we try it, we panic. It is not our reason that attacks our belief, for the evidence is unchanged and our reason still accepts it; it is our imagination, our emotions, and our nerves.¹²⁴

Our daily "battle of faith"¹²⁵ is fought not between faith on one side and reason on the other, but between faith and reason on one side and lust, terror, jealousy, boredom, or indifference on the other.¹²⁶ Faith in the sense of a virtue is the art of holding on to the supernatural things we have accepted by reason, in spite of our feelings, our moods, and the superior attraction of other things.

I knew a man who was drawn to the Catholic Church by its claims of authority. He thought it all out carefully, decided to become a Catholic, and was baptized. However, a short time later, he met a married woman, fell in love with her, and left the Church for her. I do not think that meeting her changed his reasons for becoming Catholic; I think that his emotions and desires overcame his faith and reason.¹²⁷

No conviction, however strong, will end this sort of temptation against faith. "Only the practice of faith, resulting in the habit of faith, will gradually do that."¹²⁸

Accordingly, we must *nourish* our faith; for example,

118 See CCC 1813.

119 See the "Introduction" to this course and the talk on "The Light of Faith."

120 See Jn 20:24-29.

121 Thomas had known Jesus for three years and had seen His miracles, but refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. By His rebuke, Jesus said, in effect, "You should have known Me better."

122 See CCC 1814.

123 See the "Introduction" to this course.

124 See C.S. Lewis: *Christian Reflections*, "Religion: Reality or Substitute?"

125 CCC 2573

126 See C.S. Lewis: *Christian Reflections*, "Religion: Reality or Substitute?" and *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 11.

127 Lewis, who spent many years as an atheist, said, "Just as the Christian has his moments when the clamour of this visible and audible world is so persistent and the whisper of the spiritual world so faint that faith and reason can hardly stick to their guns, so, as I well remember, the atheist too has his moments of shuddering misgiving, of an all but irresistible suspicion that the old tales may after all be true, that something or Someone from outside may at any moment break into his neat, explicable, mechanical universe" (C.S. Lewis: *Christian Reflections*, "Religion: Reality or Substitute?").

128 C.S. Lewis: *Christian Reflections*, "Religion: Reality or Substitute?"

- by attending Mass, where the Church states¹²⁹ and prays¹³⁰ what she believes.
- by making Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love throughout the day.¹³¹
- by studying our faith — in the Bible, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in the Pope's encyclicals or other pronouncements, or in books by C.S. Lewis, Scott Hahn, etc.
- by making Catholic friends, perhaps by joining Catholic social groups.¹³²

Otherwise, we risk losing our faith. Apostasy — the sin we commit when we give up our faith entirely — can be so gradual that it is almost imperceptible.

For example, take the case of a man¹³³ who claims that in apostasizing, he has merely followed his "honest opinions." His friend,¹³⁴ who has also apostasized, but repented, replies, "Let us be frank. We simply found ourselves in contact with a certain current of ideas and plunged into it because it seemed modern and successful.... When did we put up one moment's real resistance to the loss of our faith?"

Once we have lost our faith, it may be honest and sincere to say that we no longer believe, "but errors which are sincere in that sense are not innocent."¹³⁵

Hope

In ordinary English, we say, "I hope it won't rain tomorrow." We seldom say, "I trust it won't rain tomorrow" — especially in Vancouver!

What the Church means by the virtue of "hope" is closer to what we mean by "trust." In fact, "trust" is used to define "hope": "the theological virtue by which we desire the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength," but on the help of the Holy Spirit.¹³⁶

To desire "eternal life as our happiness" does not mean escapism, wishful thinking, or neglect of this world. In fact, this world has been changed most by people who were concerned about the next — like the apostles, who converted the Roman Empire, or the English Evangelicals, who abolished the slave trade.¹³⁷

We may find it difficult to "want" or "hope for" Heaven habitually. One reason is that our education focusses on this world, but another is that we do not always recognize the want in ourselves.

The longing we feel when we first fall in love, or dream of travel, or start studying a new subject, is never satisfied by marriage, travel, or knowledge. Something always evades us. The "honeymoon" never lasts.

We can try another spouse, visit a different country, or switch to another subject.

Or we can smother the longing. This makes sense if we are simply "crying for the moon," but it is disastrous if lasting, utterly satisfying happiness is really there for the taking.

Christians believe it is. We feel hunger; food satisfies it. We feel sexual desire; sex satisfies it. If we feel a desire that nothing on earth satisfies, then perhaps we were made for another world.¹³⁸

In describing the next world, Jesus often appealed to our earthly desires,¹³⁹ thus confirming that earthly pleasures point toward Heaven. We should always be grateful for them, then, but we must not mistake them for the real thing. We must keep

129 In the Creeds.

130 The axiom of Pope Celestine I (422-432) was *Legem credendi statuit lex orandi* ("The rule of prayer determines the rule of faith"), meaning that the Church's liturgy is the most effective means of preserving and interpreting the true faith.

131 See the talk on "Prayer," Appendix 1.

132 Millions of young people find such nourishment for their faith at World Youth Day.

133 A mortal, a ghost.

134 One of the solid people.

135 C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 5

136 CCC 1817

137 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 10.

138 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 10. Read Lewis' autobiography: *Surprised By Joy*.

139 Like our desires for life (Jn 10:10), light (Mt 17:2), peace (Jn 14:27), a wedding feast (Mt 8:11), wine (Is 29:6), the Father's house (Jn 14:2), the heavenly Jerusalem (Rv 21:10), and paradise (Rv 2:7).

alive in ourselves the explicit desire for our true country, Heaven.

We must imitate Abraham, our "father in faith,"¹⁴⁰ who, "hoping against hope," remained "fully persuaded that God could do whatever He had promised."¹⁴¹ We must rely on Christ's Beatitudes,¹⁴² addressed to those who suffer, which promise consolation in eternity.¹⁴³ When things go "wrong," we must remember what my mother used to say: "We're not in Heaven yet."

Charity

In ordinary English, "charity" now means "giving alms." In the present context, it means Christian love: "the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for His own sake, and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God."¹⁴⁴

We will say more about it later,¹⁴⁵ so here we will just make two points.

First: Christian "love" is a state of our will, not our feelings. It is habitual with respect to ourselves, but not necessarily with respect to others.¹⁴⁶

To understand, realize that we have probably all done things we are so ashamed of that we never tell anybody¹⁴⁷ — yet we still love ourselves. In fact, it is because we love ourselves that we are so ashamed of our behaviour.

Now charity is the habit of loving others in this way. For example, we hate what Hitler did, but we must not hate Hitler. We must love him as we love ourselves: with regret that he did such things, with the hope that he repented in time, with fervent prayers that he accepted God's forgiveness.

We can test ourselves on this point. If evidence turned up that Hitler had not been as bad as we thought, would our first feeling be "Thank God!" or would it be disappointment and determination to go on believing the worst, just for the pleasure of hating?¹⁴⁸ For hatred can be a pleasure. That is why St. Paul told us that "love does not rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices with the truth."¹⁴⁹

Second: when God told us to "love" our neighbours, He was not talking about the natural human loves: affection, friendship, and *eros* (sexual love). These kinds of love cannot be commanded or manufactured. Moreover, they can actually conflict with Christian love, as when a mother spoils her child to gratify her own feelings.

To love people in the Christian sense, we must *act as if* we love them. "As generous distributors of God's manifold grace," we must put our gifts "at the service of one another, each in the measure" we have received.¹⁵⁰ Paradoxically, we find that if we habitually act as if we love people, our feelings toward them gradually change to match our actions.¹⁵¹

Of the three theological virtues:

- faith will cease: after death, we will no longer have to believe in God, for we will see Him face to face and know Him as He knows us.¹⁵²
- hope will cease: after death, we will no longer have to desire God or His Kingdom, for we will possess them.

However, charity will not cease: we will find that love is what we were made for.

140 See Eucharistic Prayer 1.

141 See Rom 8:18-21.

142 See Mt 5:1-12.

143 See the talk on "The Beatitudes."

144 CCC 1812

145 See the talk on "Love of God and Neighbour."

146 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 9.

147 Except a priest, in a confessional, anonymously.

148 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 7.

149 1 Cor 13:4-7. People whose jobs entail correcting what is wrong are especially vulnerable to the temptation to rejoice in the wrong: teachers, in stupidity or ignorance instead of intelligence or knowledge; lawyers, in altercation instead of agreement; policemen, in crime instead of obedience to the law; prison guards, in captivity instead of freedom; doctors, in disease instead of health; priests, in sin instead of holiness. Even tow truck drivers must be tempted to rejoice in black ice or illegally parked cars!

150 1 Pt 4:10

151 See C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 9.

152 See Hos 2:21-22; 1 Cor 13:12.

Conclusion

We acquire the human virtues by education, deliberate acts, and perseverance. "Purified and elevated" by God, they constitute the "rich soil" of Jesus' parable,¹⁵³ in which the theological virtues, planted by God, can grow.¹⁵⁴

We should always ask God, therefore, to help us be virtuous¹⁵⁵ — not at some unspecified time in the future, but now, especially in the present temptation.

It is all too easy to pray as St. Augustine did: "O Master, make me chaste and celibate — but not yet!"¹⁵⁶

For example, take Alec and Laura, who have come close to committing adultery and realize that they must end their relationship.

"I know that this is the beginning of the end," Alec says. "But not quite yet — please not quite yet."

"Very well," Laura says; "not quite yet."

"Let's be careful; let's prepare ourselves," Alec says; "a sudden break now, however brave and admirable, would be too cruel — we can't do such violence to our hearts and minds."¹⁵⁷

We must never "grow despondent or abandon the struggle." After all, we have not yet "resisted to the point of shedding [our] blood."¹⁵⁸

"Affliction makes for endurance, and endurance for tested virtue, and tested virtue for hope," or trust — a trust "that will not leave us disappointed."¹⁵⁹

We must endure our trials as the discipline of God, Who deals with us as children. Our earthly parents discipline us "to prepare us for the short span of mortal life"; God does it for our true profit, that we may share His holiness.

"At the time it is administered, all discipline seems a cause for grief and not for joy,"¹⁶⁰ but later it brings forth "the first fruits of eternal glory": namely "charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control," and "chastity."¹⁶¹

Bibliography

- Benedict Groeschel: *The Courage to Be Chaste*
 Vincent Hawksell and Maureen Creelman: *Human Sexuality: Its Christian Meaning*
 C.S. Lewis: *Christian Reflections*, "Religion: Reality or Substitute?"
 C.S. Lewis: *The World's Last Night*, "On Obstinacy in Belief"
 C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*
 C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*
 C.S. Lewis: *The Screwtape Letters*

153 See Lk 8:4-15. Also see John Henry Newman: *Dispositions for Faith*.

154 See CCC 1810.

155 See CCC 1811.

156 Augustine: *Confessions*, Book VIII, 7

157 Noel Coward: *Brief Encounter*, Scene Four

158 Heb 12:1-4

159 See Rom 5:4.

160 See Heb 12:7-11.

161 See Gal 5:22-23.