

"We are never alone!"

In his 10 April general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on vices and virtues, speaking about the virtue of fortitude.

04/10/2024

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today's catechesis is dedicated to the third of the cardinal virtues, namely *fortitude*. Let us begin with the description given in the *Catechism of*

the Catholic Church: “Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions” (1808). This is what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says about the virtue of fortitude.

Here, then, is the most “combative” of the virtues. If the first of the moral virtues, that is, prudence, was primarily associated with man's reason; and while justice found its abode in the will, this third virtue, fortitude, is often linked by scholastic authors to what the ancients called the “irascible appetite”. Ancient thought did not imagine a man without passions: he would be a stone. And the passions are not necessarily the residue of a sin; but

they must be educated, they must be channelled, they must be purified with the water of Baptism, or better with the fire of the Holy Spirit. A Christian without courage, who does not turn his own strength to good, who does not bother anyone, is a useless Christian. Let us think about this! Jesus is not a diaphanous, ascetic God, who does not know human emotions. Quite the contrary. Faced with the death of His friend Lazarus, He breaks down in tears, and His impassioned spirit is apparent in some of His expressions, such as when He says: “I came to cast fire upon the earth, and would that it were already kindled!” (*Lk 12:49*); and confronted with the trade in the temple, He reacted with force (cf. *Mt. 21: 12-13*). Jesus had passion.

But let us now look for an existential description of this important virtue that helps us be fruitful in life. The ancients – both the Greek

philosophers and Christian theologians – recognized a twofold development in the virtue of fortitude: one *passive*, the other *active*.

The first is directed *within ourselves*. There are internal enemies we must defeat, which go by the name of anxiety, anguish, fear, guilt: all forces that stir in our innermost selves and in some situations paralyse us. How many fighters succumb before they even begin the challenge! Because they are not aware of these internal enemies. Fortitude is first and foremost a victory against ourselves. Most of the fears that arise within us are unrealistic, and do not come true at all. It is better, then, to invoke the Holy Spirit and face everything with patient fortitude: one problem at a time, as we are able, but not alone! The Lord is with us, if we trust in Him and sincerely seek the good. Then in every situation we can count

on God's providence to shield and armour us.

And then there is the second movement of the virtue of fortitude, this time of a more active nature. As well as internal trials, there are *external enemies*, which are the *trials of life*, persecutions, difficulties that we did not expect and that surprise us. Indeed, we can try to predict what will happen to us, but to a large extent reality is made up of imponderable events, and in this sea sometimes our boat is tossed about by the waves. Fortitude then makes us resilient sailors, who are not frightened or discouraged.

Fortitude is a fundamental virtue because it *takes the challenge of evil in the world seriously*. Some pretend it does not exist, that everything is going fine, that human will is not sometimes blind, that dark forces that bring death do not lurk in

history. But it suffices to leaf through a history book, or unfortunately even the newspapers, to discover the nefarious deeds of which we are partly victims and partly perpetrators: wars, violence, slavery, oppression of the poor, wounds that have never healed and continue to bleed. The virtue of fortitude makes us react and cry out “no”, an emphatic “no” to all of this. In our comfortable Western world, which has watered everything down somewhat, which has transformed the pursuit of perfection into a simple organic development, which has no need for struggle because everything looks the same, we sometimes feel a healthy nostalgia for prophets. But disruptive, visionary people are very rare. There is a need for someone who can rouse us from the soft place in which we have lain down and make us resolutely repeat our “no” to evil and to everything that leads to

indifference. “No” to evil and “no” to indifference; “yes” to progress, to the path that moves us forward, and for this we must fight.

Let us therefore rediscover in the Gospel the fortitude of Jesus, and learn it from the witness of the saints. Thank you.

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