

## FORTITUDE

Previous reading: *Compendium*, 382; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1808-1837.

What is fortitude? Fortitude assures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It reaches even to the ability of possibly sacrificing one's own life for a just cause.

### **I. Fortitude, a synthesis.**

*a) Definition of fortitude: Fortitude is that cardinal virtue which strengthens the irascible appetite (and will) enabling it to continue its pursuit of a difficult good even in the face of the greatest dangers to bodily life.*

Fortitude resides in the irascible appetite to the extent that it is subject to the control of the will, since it strengthens this appetite to curb the passions of fear and recklessness easily and promptly at the approach of supreme danger.

The matter of fortitude includes those most severe dangers which ought to be withstood reasonably, viz. the expulsion of excessive fear and the curbing of excessive recklessness.

*b) Acts of fortitude: There are two acts of fortitude – the suppression of fear and the curbing of recklessness. These acts reach their peak in martyrdom.*

*Martyrdom is the endurance of death in witness to the truth of Christianity.* Therefore three *conditions* must be verified for martyrdom: a) actual death; b) the infliction of death by an enemy out of hatred for Christianity; c) the voluntary acceptance of death. The *effects* of martyrdom are: a) the remission of all sin and punishment, since martyrdom is an act of perfect charity; b) the martyr's aureole is a privileged reward corresponding to this privileged victory.

*c) Integral and potential parts of fortitude: Since fortitude is a most singular virtue it allows no further species or subjective parts. But its potential and integral parts are four in number: magnanimity, munificence, patience, perseverance; these virtues are looked upon as*

integral parts of fortitude inasmuch as they help the latter to bring to perfection the acts of suppression of fear and the curbing of recklessness; they are potential parts to the extent that they concern less difficult matters.

1) *Magnanimity is a virtue inclining all to perform great works in every virtue – works deserving of high honors.* The object, therefore, of this virtue is the due acquisition of high honors which cannot be obtained except through the exercise of difficult Christian virtues. To seek honors merely in order to obtain wealth or other material possessions is not a sign of magnanimity since such things are not truly great and are not of themselves deserving of honor.

Magnanimity is a distinct virtue in a true sense of the word since it has its own exalted object, in that it impels man to obtain great honors through noble deeds. It is in no way opposed to humility since these two virtues are founded on two different considerations: magnanimity tends towards great works in so far as they can be performed with the help of God's grace; humility considers man's own defects and leads him to despise himself and prefer others to himself.

The characteristics of this virtue are well portrayed by St. Thomas following the teaching of Aristotle: the magnanimous man a) takes a restrained delight in even the greatest honors offered to him, b) remains unruffled both by prosperity and adversity, c) willingly helps others although he himself asks hardly anyone to help him, d) does not fawn upon important personages neither does he allow his liberty to be restricted by their authority, e) he is not ambitious, f) he expresses his opinions boldly when necessary for he has no fear of man, g) forgets injuries received, h) moves slowly in the external acts of his body.

2) *Munificence is the virtue which moderates the love of money so that man is ready to incur great expense in necessary external works.*

Consequently munificence differs from magnanimity as a species from the genus; magnanimity strives for greatness in every sphere and in all the virtues, munificence inspires a man to greatness in the construction of external things.

The matter or object of this latter virtue is the incurring of heavy expenses for external works. Since this is something special and

difficult, munificence is a distinct virtue to be practiced by rulers and the wealthy who are able to undertake such works. This virtue differs also from liberality inasmuch as the latter concerns itself with moderate sums of money, the former with large amounts.

3) *Patience is the virtue which inclines man to endure present evils so that he may not be unreasonably sorrowful.*

If patience is exercised to control sorrow at the approach of death, it is an integral part of fortitude; if the sorrow is caused by minor evils, patience then becomes a potential part of fortitude. Patience is indeed a necessary virtue and Christ Himself states: *It is by endurance that you will secure possession of your souls (Lk 21:19).*

The means to be used in the attainment of this virtue are: a) the careful consideration of God's patience in bearing with sinners, b) Christ's patience in life and in death, c) the patience of the Saints in enduring all forms of evil, d) the results of patience which are satisfaction for past sins and eternal happiness, e) evils caused by impatience.

4) *Perseverance; the virtue which inclines man to continue in the exercise of the virtues in accordance with right reason notwithstanding the irksomeness which results from protracted action.*

It is true that every virtue is constant and sees its act through to the end, but perseverance supplies this constancy for a special motive, viz. for the moral goodness to be found in completing a work in spite of its attendant difficulties.

*The gift of fortitude* (which aids and perfects the virtue of fortitude) imparts to the soul a singular strength in resisting evil and attaining to everlasting life.

## **II. Vices contrary to fortitude:**

There are three vices opposed to fortitude, four opposed to magnanimity, two opposed to munificence, two opposed to patience, and two opposed to perseverance.

1. Opposed to fortitude are: a) cowardice or timidity, b) fearlessness, and c) recklessness. a) *Timidity* is the inordinate fear of temporal ills and

especially of death; it is an excess of fear and a lack of daring. That defect in daring is usually known as cowardice. b) *Fearlessness* is a vice which lacks sufficient fear of danger. c) *Recklessness* is a vice which leads a man to excess in meeting danger.

2. Opposed to magnanimity are: a) presumption, b) ambition, c) vainglory, d) pusillanimity. a) *Presumption* is a vice which urges man to undertake works exceeding his strength. Consequently this vice is not to be confused with another form of presumption opposed to the theological virtue of hope, which trusts in obtaining eternal happiness through means not intended by God. b) *Ambition* is a vice which gives man an inordinate longing for honor. Such an inordinate desire for honor very often has just the opposite effect to that which is desired, since it leads a man into derision and contempt. c) *Vainglory* is an inordinate desire for vain glory. d) *Pusillanimity* is a vice which inclines man to refuse to undertake or do something as being too much for him and beyond his strength when in fact it is not.

3. Opposed to munificence are: unreasonable expenditure and greediness. a) *Unreasonable expenditure* is the vice which inclines man to incur expenses which are entirely unreasonable. b) *Greediness* is the vice which inclines man to refuse unreasonably to incur great expenses even when necessary.

4. Opposed to patience by defect is insensibility, by excess impatience. a) *Insensibility* or lack of feeling is the vice which leaves a man unmoved by his own or other people's ills. This represents a lack of sorrow and an excess of endurance and has the appearance of coarse brutality. b) *Impatience* is the vice which inclines man to excessive sadness and draws him away from good because of his sadness or sorrow. Therefore the man who is impatient suffers from an excess of sadness and lacks endurance.

5. Opposed to perseverance are two vices, one by defect viz. inconstancy, the other by excess, viz. pertinacity. a) *Inconstancy* is the vice which makes a man only too ready to cease from some work which he has begun because of the difficulties involved in its continuance. Inconstancy is a form of irresolution which finds itself unable to resist the difficulties that arise. b) *Pertinacity* is the vice which inclines man to continue in some act beyond that which is reasonable.

(Prümmer D. M., *Handbook of moral theology*, nn. 473-484; Pieper J., *Fortitude*, in *The four cardinal virtues*.

### III. Selected texts:

**Fortitude, a human virtue.** “The Human virtue, of which we are speaking now, is that which makes a man good, and renders his work good. Now man's good is to be *in accordance with reason*... Wherefore it belongs to human virtue to make man good, *to make his work in accord with reason*. This happens in three ways: (1°) first, *by rectifying reason itself*, and this is done by the intellectual virtues;

(2°) secondly, by establishing *the rectitude of reason in human affairs*, and this belongs to *justice*;

(3°) thirdly, by removing the obstacles to the establishment of this rectitude in human affairs. Now the human will is hindered in two ways from following the rectitude of reason. (a) First, through being drawn by some *object of pleasure* to something other than what the rectitude of reason requires; and this obstacle is removed by the virtue of *temperance*. (b) Secondly, through the will being disinclined to follow that which is in accordance with reason, *on account of some difficulty that presents itself*. In order to remove this obstacle *fortitude* of the mind is requisite, whereby to resist the aforesaid difficulty even as a man, by fortitude of body, overcomes and removes bodily obstacles. – Hence it is evident that fortitude is a virtue, in so far as it conforms man to reason” (Aquinas, *STh* 2-2, 123, 1).

“The term "*fortitude*" can be taken in two ways. (1°) First, as simply denoting *a certain firmness of mind*, and in this sense it is *a general virtue*, or rather a condition of every virtue, since... it is requisite for every virtue to act firmly and immovably. (2°) Secondly, fortitude may be taken to denote *firmness only in bearing and withstanding those things wherein it is most difficult to be firm, namely in certain grave dangers*. Therefore Tully says (*Rhet.* II), that "*fortitude is deliberate facing of dangers and bearing of toils*". In this sense fortitude is reckoned a special virtue, because it has a special matter” (Aquinas, *STh* 2-2, 123, 2).

“It belongs to fortitude *to strengthen man in the good of virtue, especially against dangers, and chiefly against dangers of death, and most of all against those that occur in battle*. Now it is evident that in

martyrdom man is firmly strengthened in the good of virtue, since he cleaves to faith and justice notwithstanding the threatening danger of death, the imminence of which is moreover due to a kind of particular contest with his persecutors. Hence Cyprian says in a sermon: "The crowd of onlookers wondered to see an unearthly battle, and Christ's servants fighting erect, undaunted in speech, with souls unmoved, and strength divine" (*Ep. ad Mart. et Conf.* ii). Wherefore it is evident that martyrdom is an act of fortitude; for which reason the Church reads in the office of Martyrs: They *became valiant in battle* [*Heb. 11:34*]" (Aquinas, *STh* 2-2, 124, 2).

#### **IV. Means of Growth in fortitude.**

The principal means of growth in the virtue of fortitude and in those virtues related to it are the following:

1) Constantly to beg it of God, for although it is true that this is a general means which applies to all the virtues, since *every supernatural gift comes from God* (*James* 1: 17), when it is a question of the virtue of fortitude we need the special assistance of God, due to the laxity and weakness of our human nature, wounded by sin. Without the help of God, *we can do nothing* (*John* 15:5), but with His help *we can do all things* (*Phil.* 4:13). For that reason, Scripture repeatedly insists on the necessity of asking help from God, who is our strength: *You are my rock and my fortress* (Ps. 30:4; cfr. Ps. 67:36).

2) To foresee the difficulties which we shall encounter on the path of virtue. St. Thomas recommends this practice to all Christians, and especially to those who have not yet acquired the habit of working with fortitude. In this way one gradually overcomes his fear, and when difficulties actually arise, he will overcome them much more easily because he has anticipated them.

3) To accept with a generous spirit the little annoyances of daily life. Every vocation in life is accompanied with its own particular crosses and difficulties, even if it be merely a matter of the monotony of one's daily activities. If we do not learn to accept the inevitable inconveniences and small trials of daily life, such as cold and heat, pain and discomfort, small illnesses and aches, contradictions and ingratitude, we shall never make any progress in cultivating the Christian virtue of fortitude.

4) To meditate frequently on the passion and death of Christ. There is nothing which so animates and comforts delicate souls as the contemplation of the heroism of Christ. He was *a man of sorrows and was acquainted with infirmities* (Isa. 53:3), and He left us an example of suffering so that we would follow in His footsteps. We shall never have to suffer in our sinful bodies any pains comparable to those which He voluntarily suffered out of love for us. However great our sufferings of soul or body, we can raise our eyes to the crucifix, and Christ will give us the fortitude to bear them without bitterness and without complaining. It is likewise helpful to remember the ineffable sorrows of Mary (cfr. Lam. I: 12).

5) To intensify our love of God. Love is as strong as death (*Cant.* 8:6), and it does not yield to any obstacle in the pursuit of pleasing the beloved. That is what gave St. Paul the superhuman fortitude by which he overcame tribulation, anguish, persecution, hunger, danger and the sword. *But in all these things we overcome, because of him who has loved us* (Rom. 8:37). When one truly loves God, there are no longer any difficulties in serving Him, and one's very weakness becomes the basis for hoping in Him. *Gladly therefore I will glory in my infirmities, that the strength of Christ may dwell in me.... For when I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

**V. Questions.** What is my attitude when faced with fears, suffering, crosses? Am I ready to endure the little crosses of every day? What are the means I need to increase my fortitude?