

Pray for the Gift of Fortitude

Following are excerpts from the general audience address of Pope John Paul II, given on Nov. 15.

Whom do we regard as a strong, courageous man? This word usually conjures up the soldier who defends his homeland, exposing to danger his health, and in wartime, even his life. We realize, however, that we need fortitude also in peacetime. And so we highly esteem persons who distinguish themselves for so-called "civil courage." A testimony of fortitude is offered to us by anyone who risks his own life to save some one who is about to drown, or by one who provides help in natural calamities, such as fire, floods, etc. St. Charles, my patron saint, certainly distinguished himself for this virtue when, during the plague in Milan, he carried out his pastoral ministry among the inhabitants of that city. But we think also with admiration of those men who climb the peaks of Everest or of the astronauts who set foot on the moon for the first time.



As can be seen from all this, the manifestations of the virtue of fortitude are numerous. Some of them are well known and enjoy a certain fame. Others are less known, although they often call for even greater virtue. Fortitude, in fact, as we have said, is a virtue, a cardinal virtue. Allow me to draw your attention to examples that are generally not well known but which bear witness in themselves to great, sometimes even heroic virtue. I am thinking, for example, of a woman, already the mother of a large family, who is "advised" by so many to suppress a new life conceived in her womb, by undergoing "the operation" of interruption of pregnancy; and she replies firmly, "No."

She certainly feels all the difficulty that this "no" brings with it, difficulty for herself, for her husband, for the whole family, and yet she replies, "No." The new human life conceived in her is a value too great, too "sacred," for her to be able to give in to such pressure.

Another example: a man who is promised freedom and also an easy career provided he denies his own principles, or approves of something that is against his own sense of honesty towards others. And he too replies, "No," although he is faced by threats on the one side, and attractions on the other. Here we have a courageous man!

There are many, a great many manifestations of fortitude, often heroic, of which nothing is written in the newspapers, or of which little is known. Only human conscience knows them — and God knows!

I wish to pay tribute to all these unknown courageous people. To all those who have the courage

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to say "no" or "yes" when they have to pay a price to do so! To the men who bear an extraordinary witness to human dignity and deep humanity. Just because they are unknown, they deserve a tribute and special recognition.

According to the teaching of St. Thomas, the virtue of fortitude is found in the man,

- who is ready "accredi pericula," that is, to face danger;
- who is ready "sustinere mala," that is, to put up with adversities for a just cause, for truth, for justice, etc.

The virtue of fortitude always calls for a certain overcoming of human weakness and particularly of fear. Man, indeed, by nature, spontaneously fears danger, affliction, and suffering. Therefore courageous men must be sought not only on battlefields, but also in hospital wards or on a bed of pain.

Such men could often be found in concentration camps or in places of deportation. They were real heroes.

Fear sometimes deprives of civil courage men who are living in a climate of threats, oppression or persecution. The men who are capable of crossing the so-called barrier of fear to bear witness to truth and justice have then a special value. To reach such fortitude, man must in a certain way "go beyond" his own limits and "transcend" himself, running "the risk" of an unknown situation, the risk of being frowned upon, the risk of laying himself open to unpleasant consequences, insults, degradations, material losses, perhaps imprisonment or persecution. To attain this fortitude, man must be sustained by a great love for truth and for good, to which he dedicates himself.

The virtue of fortitude proceeds hand in hand with the capacity of sacrificing oneself. This virtue had already a well-defined contour among the Ancients. With Christ it acquired an evangelical, Christian contour. The Gospel is addressed to weak, poor, meek

and humble men, peacemakers and to the merciful, but at the same time it contains a constant appeal to fortitude. It often repeats, "Fear not." It teaches man that, for a just cause, for truth, for justice, one must be able to "lay down one's life."

I wish here to refer to yet another example, which goes back 400 years ago, but which still remains alive and relevant today. It is the case of St. Stanislaus Kostka, the patron saint of the young, whose tomb is in the church of St. Andrea al Quirinale in Rome. Here, in fact, he ended his life at the age of 18. By nature he was very sensitive and tender, yet courageous. Fortitude led him, coming from a noble family, to choose to be poor, following the example of Christ, and to put himself in his exclusive service. Although his decision met with firm opposition on the part of his circle, he succeeded with great love, but also with great firmness, in realizing his resolution, contained in the motto: "Ad maiora natus sum" (I was born for greater things). He arrived at the novitiate of the Jesuits, travelling from Vienna to Rome on foot and trying to escape from his pursuers who wished by force to turn this "obstinate" youth from his intentions.

To be men we need fortitude. The truly prudent man, in fact is only he who possesses the virtue of fortitude; just as also the truly just man is only he who has the virtue of fortitude.

Let us pray for this gift of the Holy Spirit which is called the "gift of fortitude." When man lacks the strength to "transcend" himself, in view of higher values, such as truth, justice, vocation, faithfulness in marriage, this "gift from above" must make each of us a strong man and at the right moment, say to us "deep down," Courage!

More Opinions

'Strange' Things Happening

Editor:

During the Women's Ordination Conference in Baltimore some strange goings-on were recorded. One speaker, who had consecrated her life to God and the Church, a nun (!) vov of obedience and all, from a midwestern Catholic university, boasted that she regularly celebrated "Mass" there. Incredible? But true. Another foolish virgin representative proposed boycotting Holy Communion — spiritual hungerstrike (NCR Nov. 24).

A suitable title for the three-day circus would have been: "Unveiling of Nun of Tomorrow sans veil, sans vows, sans

everything. Now I love all God's chillun, but I hate to see anyone making a fool of herself. Except for Christ's sake.

It transpired also that a large group of priests were backing the movement; Rome's latest pronouncement on Holy Orders notwithstanding. We're all Popes anyway.

In an Age of No Taboos all this is still a bit of a shocker coming from inside the Church. Such recalcitrance too from folks who subscribe, ostensibly, to the Decalogue and the Counsels of Perfection to boot (pun intended). The lemming-like behavior of the Baltimore feminists recalls what Scripture forewarned about interpreting the new law and

the prophets to one's own headlong destruction.

A recent letter signed by a foursome of priests and nuns complained about a right-to-life election ad in a diocesan paper. It snidely and unjustly insinuated that pro-life people have no concern for euthanasia and other human life issues. Actually they are the most dedicated champions of all human life causes. From the four bleeding hearts no word of criticism about accepting other well-paid ads from candidates who openly support the funding of what Pope Paul VI called "an unspeakable crime."

Is loyalty to the Vicar of Christ no longer the hallmark of a sound Catholic? "They who hear you hear Me." Or is the whole purpose of Christianity a sort of

popularity contest with the jet set? Catholics should be the last people in the world to be on the defensive. A grandson of St. Elizabeth Seton lamented in his time the political apathy and imbecility of Catholics generally. How apropos today. A no-nonsense re-evaluation is clearly indicated.

In a permissive pretentious adulterous age, it takes a strong faith and uncommon commonsense and wisdom to stomach post-conciliar shenanigans. It requires stout hearts and steady heads not to be swayed by a proliferation of bizarre antics on the part of a fanatic fringe of clergy and religious (lower case). The ordinary layman (oops!) layperson is totally discombobulated.

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