

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 8, 2008

INTRODUCTION: Theological Virtues = Life for the Christian Soul

We have all heard the term "**theological virtues.**"

- ? We have heard the term in CCD or RCIA classes, in talks, and we have seen the term in different Catholic books,
- ? but can we say that the term really **means** something for us – **personally**?
- ? "The theological virtues." It sounds like an academic lecture, so dry, so boring.
- ? And yet, if we scratch just a little bit **beneath the surface** of the term, we will find a **treasure** of energy, purpose, and wisdom.

The term "the theological virtues" refers to **supernatural powers at work in the soul of every Christian.**

- ? At **baptism**, God himself **breathes** them into our soul.
- ? Someone who has not been baptized **doesn't have them.**
- ? Through the **other** sacraments, these virtues are further **strengthened and developed.**
- ? When we **use and exercise** these powers, they grow to **maturity**, helping a mediocre Christian become a **saint.**

If we **know better** what these powers are, we will better be able to **exercise** them and become the saint God calls each one of us to become. And today's readings give us the perfect opportunity to do just this – to know better what the "Theological Virtues" are.

ILLUSTRATIONS Part I: The Meaning of "Virtue"

The first thing we need to understand is what the words mean.

Normally, when we think of the word "virtue," we think of a good habit - as opposed to "vice," which is a bad habit.

But the word has a deeper meaning as well.

- ? It comes from the Latin term, *virtus*, which means **strength** or **power.**
- ? Virtues, in this **fuller** sense, are the **mature development** of the **potential** (the **powers and the strengths**) that exists in every **human soul.**
- ? A **just** man has developed the **potential** every human being has to be fair, honest, and trustworthy - he has **the virtue of justice.**

- ? A **prudent** woman has developed the **potential** every human being has to think carefully about the consequences before acting
- ? Someone who exhibits the virtue of **temperance** has developed the **potential** every human being has to control natural desires and use them according to our reason – they’ve learned to say “no” to natural urges – they’ve learned we operate on reason, not on instinct.
- ? There are **many powers** in the human soul, and that is why there are **many virtues**.
- ? The development of **character** is simply the healthy development of those powers, of those **human virtues**.

A **vice** is the **distortion and deformation** of those potentialities.

- ? The **lustful** man, for example, has **deformed his potential** to become a loving, faithful, strong, and generous husband and father. Instead, he has become a **slave to pleasure**.
- ? A **greedy** man has **deformed his potential** to recognize that all he’s received is a gift from God – and, after providing for his own needs (and those of his family), is unwilling to share his wealth with others who are in want or in need.

However, the **theological** virtues **differ** from **human** virtues in two ways.

- ? First, they do not **come with** human nature - they are **super-natural**; they are **infused** into our soul by God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, at baptism.
- ? And secondly, they do not simply help us to develop **human character**.
- ? Instead, they enable us to develop **divine character**, to **act with God's own powers**, as God's very **children, sharing** in his divine nature, thus **becoming saints**.

They **come from God**, and they **direct us towards God** - that is why they are called "theological."

- ? That word comes from two Greek terms: *theos*, meaning God, and *logos* meaning **order**.
- ? The theological virtues are **powers** that place **divine order**, not just human order, into our souls.

Part II: The Supernatural Vision of Faith

There are **three** of these theological virtues: **faith, hope, and love**.

The first one, the **foundation** of the other two, is **faith**.

God infuses the power of faith into our minds so that we can **understand** what He **wants to reveal to us**.

- ? Without this **supernatural power of understanding**, Christianity makes no sense.
- ? How do we know that Christ is **truly present** in the Eucharist? Only by faith.

- ? How do we know that Jesus **rose** from the dead? Only by faith.
- ? How do we know that the official teaching of the Church will **never lead us astray** when it comes to the things of God (no matter what I personally think)? Only by faith.
- ? Without this **supernatural**, theological virtue, such revealed truths are simply **beyond** our limited, human minds.

God is beyond our ability to fully comprehend and understand. It's kind of like our knowledge of the sun up there in the sky:

- ? With our **natural** powers, we can only know the sun **indirectly**, through its **effects**, through its **rays** – **and its HEAT!**
- ? But God **loves** us so much that he wants us to **know him directly**, so he gives us **new, supernatural eyesight**: the theological virtue of faith.
- ? This is why the **saints** are so **wise**.
- ? Their mature faith enables them to **see God in all things**, and to **see everything as God sees it**.
- ? They are people able to see and understand **clues** to the meaning of life and the universe that others don't even **notice**.

In today's Second Reading, St Paul **praises Abraham** for his faith:

- ? Abraham **believed in God's promise** - that he would become the father of many nations - even though merely **natural forces** could never make that happen.
- ? He had **faith in God** - had **supernatural eyesight**.

Part III: Supernatural Courage and Supernatural Love

If faith is supernatural **eyesight**, **hope** is supernatural **courage**.

By the theological virtue of hope, God gives us **supernatural willpower**.

- ? When our faith is healthy, it shows us **what path** to follow in life.
- ? But it doesn't take away the **obstacles and difficulties** along that path - and since we live in a **fallen world** and have a **fallen human nature**, there are **many** of those.
- ? Hope is the rock-solid, supernatural **certainty** that **no matter how many obstacles and hardships** come up **God will come to our help and lead us to victory**.
- ? St Paul praises Abraham for his hope, for "hoping against hope."
- ? In other words, when things looked **impossible** humanly speaking, Abraham **continued to trust** in God.
- ? He was even willing to **sacrifice his own son**, if God wanted him to do so.
- ? This virtue **shines most brightly** in the **martyrs** - those Christians who could have had **comfort, pleasure, and wealth** in the world, but **gave all that up** in order to **cling to their friendship with God**.

- ? This is the virtue Pope Benedict encouraged us to develop during his recent trip to the US – to see **Christ as the source of all our hope** – and **Christ as the REASON** for all our hope.

The third theological virtue is **charity**, or **love**.

- ? This is the **greatest virtue** of all.
- ? It enables us to **love God and neighbor just as God loves** - without conditions, or limits, or hesitation – wanting nothing for ourselves – but giving all for the one we love.
- ? It **supernaturalizes our heart**, so that we are full of the **mercy and selflessness** that was praised in today's First Reading, and that **motivated Christ's entire life**: "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do... I have come to call sinners."
- ? Theological charity enabled **Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta** to spend **forty years** cleaning the putrid wounds of dying lepers even while **in her own soul** she felt nothing but **abandonment, loneliness, and heaviness**.

CONCLUSION: With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility

These virtues give every Christian the **supernatural potential** to become a saint.

- ? But they don't develop **automatically** - like **muscles**, these virtues are only developed if we **exercise** them: and that exercise is **daily obedience to God's will**.
- ? As we heard in today's **Gospel**, St. Matthew heard Christ's call, but the **decision to follow** was his own,
- ? We, too, **constantly** hear God calling us in our conscience, but we must **decide**, each day, to **follow**.

One of my favorite movies came out in 2004: *Spiderman 2*. In it, Peter Parker, the young man who is Spiderman, finds he's having an internal struggle:

- ? He discovers that the **special powers** he has been given don't necessarily make his life **easier**.
- ? In fact, they demand **self-sacrifice**, and even **heroism**.
- ? For a while, in the movie, he tries to **hide** his powers.
- ? He doesn't want to accept the **self-sacrifice**.
- ? He doesn't want to **battle** against the forces of evil - it's too **uncomfortable**, too **inconvenient**.
- ? But then a series of events make him realize that he is **being untrue to his very self** by **hiding** his powers, by trying to live **just like everybody else**.
- ? And the words of his wise uncle come back to his mind: "You've been given a **gift**, Peter. With great **power**, comes great **responsibility**."

Every one of us has been given a much, much **greater** gift than any comic book hero or movie character. We have been given the **very life of God** in our souls, through the **theological virtues**.

Today, as Christ **nourishes** that life through Holy Communion, and as he **renews his hope** in us, let's **renew our commitment** to be his **true followers**, to work on exercising the “theological virtues” through obedience to Him.

- ? That's not what **everyone around us** is doing.
- ? That's not the **easier** path.
- ? But that **is** our **responsibility**, that **is** how we can **glorify God**, and **that will be our true, everlasting joy**.