

## **Virtues**

A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of oneself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his/her sensory and spiritual powers; she/he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.

### **The Human Virtues**

Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life.

### **The Cardinal Virtues**

These are the virtues which are the chief foundation (Lat. *Cardo*, hinge) of a human's moral life. Since the time of St. Ambrose, the name has been given to the four moral virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. "If anyone loves righteousness, [Wisdom's] labors are virtues; for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice, and courage." (Wis 8:7)

### **Prudence**

Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; "the prudent man looks where he is going." (Prov 14:15)  
Prudence is "right reason in action" writes St. Thomas.

According to scholastic theology it is that virtue which gives one a knowledge of one's moral duty and of the concrete means to its accomplishment. For this reason, it is the first of the cardinal virtues.

According to Scripture, the prudent person is one who can interpret one's own concrete situation and discern spirits, who keeps watch and is ever mindful of one's own death and the coming of the Lord (Ps 90:12; Mt 25:1-13; 1 Jn 4:1ff).

Prudence is not to be confused with timidity or fear, nor with duplicity or dissimulation. It is called the charioteer of the virtues since it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience. The prudent person determines and directs her/his conduct in accordance with this judgment. With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid.

### **Justice**

The "disposition in virtue of which a person has the firm and constant will to render everyone his due" (St. Thomas Aquinas). In the classical doctrine of the virtues, justice is the second cardinal virtue. Though justice ranks as the highest moral virtue, in its Christian form it is inseparable from love, since more is required of the Christian than a non-partisan attitude which would allow everyone the same rights or respect for irreducible rights to things of an objective kind. Justice towards one's neighbor disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just person is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of her/his conduct toward one's neighbor.

## **Fortitude**

In the Thomist doctrine of the virtues, fortitude is the third cardinal virtue, whereby one stands firm in hope against the overwhelming pressures and tragedies of the world and against fear, especially the dread of death. It is ordered to prudence, since fortitude is not meant to be pointless daredevilry.

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. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice one's life in defense of a just cause. "The Lord is my strength and my song." Ps 118:14. "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (Jn 16:33)

## **Temperance**

The virtue which enables one to control one's passions and emotions by reason and keep them in the "mean". In the Thomistic doctrine of the virtues temperance is the last of the four cardinal virtues and is expressed in a series of subordinate virtues, for example, in actual temperance (to do with food and drink), chastity, and modesty.

Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion: "Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites." (Sir 18:30)

St. Augustine: "To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one's heart, with all one's soul and with all one's efforts; from this it comes about that love is kept whole and uncorrupted (through temperance). No misfortune can disturb it (and this is fortitude). It obeys only [God] (and this is justice), and is careful in discerning things, so as not to be surprised by deceit or trickery (and this is prudence)." [*De moribus eccl.* 1, 25, 36]

## **The Virtues and Grace**

Human virtues, with God's help, forge character and give facility in the practice of the good. It is not easy for the human being, wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance. Christ's gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues. Everyone should always ask for this grace of light and strength.

Sources: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1803-1811; *Dictionary of Theology*, Second Edition, Rahner and Vorgrimler, Crossroad, 1981.

[Adapted from T. Knoebel, SHSST Resident Seminarian Quarantine Retreat (19-24 August 2020), Conference 1, 19 August 2020]

Questions for Reflection:

1. How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected me spiritually?
2. Has the pandemic affected my ability or readiness to trust God and his Providence?
3. How have I been dealing with the uncertainty and insecurity of life in the midst of Covid-19?
4. How has the virtue of prudence affected my daily life? Has it helped me strike a balance between fear and foolhardiness?
5. What does the virtue of justice have to say to me, for example, with regard to those who choose to wear masks, or choose not to wear them?
6. How has the virtue of fortitude helped me in my reaction to the Virus? Has it helped me remain firm and steadfast? Has it helped me conquer fear?
7. How has temperance been a force in my life during these months, moderating my instincts toward anger, toward fear? Has it helped me control my passions or coping devices? How has it affected my use of created goods? Have I been a “moderate” person?
8. How has my faith affected or directed my behavior over these past six or seven months?
9. How is Jesus a model for me of how to live the cardinal virtues?
10. Has my experience of the Virus and the world’s response to it had any impact on my desire to continue to work at SHSST?

[Adapted from T. Knoebel, SHSST Resident Seminarian Quarantine Retreat (19-24 August 2020), Conference 1, 19 August 2020]

Further questions for consideration:

1. People speak of “wanting to get back to normal.” What does “normal” mean to you?
2. What are some good aspects of the old “normal”?
3. What are some bad aspects of the old “normal”?
4. If we can’t return to “normal,” how will our life be, or should it be, different after the Virus?

[Adapted from T. Knoebel, SHSST Resident Seminarian Quarantine Retreat (19-24 August 2020), Conference 2, 19 August 2020: see *The London Tablet*: “A time for renewal: an Editorial”, 13 August 2020]