

Interior Life Session #4

Getting Free: Virtue as the Standard of Happiness

"It is precisely through his acts that man attains perfection as man."

-St John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, #71

"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."⁶²

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 himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.

The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.⁶³

-CCC 1803

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 virtuous man is he who freely practices the good. -CCC 1804

Put Simply: Virtue is the capacity and desire to act well with quickness, ease, and joy.

Theological Virtues - infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. -CCC 1813

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith "man freely commits his entire self to God."⁷⁸ For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God's will. "The righteous shall live by faith." Living faith "work[s] through charity." -CCC 1814

-It is a participation in God's own Knowledge

Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." –CCC 1817

-It is a participation in God's own desire

Charity/Love is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.

-It is a participation in who God is

Cardinal Virtues- virtues on which others "hinge"

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... Prudence is "right reason in action," writes St. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle. – CCC 1806

Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the "virtue of religion." Justice toward men 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.
–CCC 1807

Fortitude/Courage 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. –CCC 1808

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. –CCC 1809

Vices and Contrary Virtues According to Aquinas and *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses* by Dr Jean Claude Larchet

Capital Vice- Pride is mother of all(Sadness is mentioned in Desert Fathers)	Contrary Specific Virtue	Contrary Theological or Cardinal Virtue	Therapy which opposes the vice
Vainglory	Magnanimity	Fortitude/Courage	Humility
Wrath	Meekness	Temperance	Gentleness & Patience
Envy	Joy at Our Neighbor's Good	Charity/Love	Charity
Sloth/Acedia	Joy of Charity toward God	Charity	Perseverance, Hope, Remembrance of Sins, & Remembrance of Death
Avarice	Generosity	Justice	Simplicity (Non- Possession) & Alms Giving
Gluttony	Abstinence	Temperance	Temperance
Lust	Chastity	Temperance	Chastity/Continenence
Sadness	Not Listed	Not Listed	Mourning, Compunction, Joy

So, How Do I Acquire Virtue?

If Virtue is the capacity and desire to act well with quickness, ease, and joy, what do I do if I don't have the capacity or desire to do so?

Like learning a language or musical instrument...

Virtue allows us to re-order our disordered Passions (desires, emotions, feelings)

Can I change the way I feel? YES!!!

In the moment...

Step 1. PRAY and ASK for God's help!

Step 2. RESIST Misdirected Impulses. This is often called "Checking the Passions"

Step 3. Mentally FOCUS on the pleasing aspects of what's good and the displeasing aspects of what's bad. This is "Commanding the Passions".

Long Term...

- Spend time with God in Prayer
- Resolution in Prayer
- Daily Examination, especially around your Predominant Fault
- Accountability with Spiritual Director, Spouse, and/or a good friend
- Bi-Weekly or Monthly Sacramental Confession

Virtue Map: Courage & Her Daughter Virtues...

I – Courage

Courage is the virtue that enables us to choose and remain faithful to the good or a greater good despite fear, difficulty, cost, or its heaviness upon our souls. It concerns **fear of evil**, especially loss, suffering, rejection, or failure. *Modern courage is often needed to face what is meaningful as much as to face danger.*

Signs you need Courage *right now* - **What you may be feeling/experiencing:**

- Fear of confrontation or consequences
- Temptation to stay silent when truth is required
- Anxiety about standing alone (**Cowardice** attacks us)
- Strong desire to avoid something important – just don't want to do it, or do many other things, avoiding it (**Sloth** attacks, either in the form of laziness *or* hyperactivity)

Some examples:

- Avoiding a hard but necessary conversation
- Avoiding addressing a serious student issue because of parent backlash
- Not enforcing a standard because you're afraid of conflict mid-year

What you can do *in the moment*

1. **Name the good clearly** - "This needs to be addressed."
2. **Act despite fear, not after fear disappears** - Courage acts *with* fear present.
3. **Choose the smallest faithful step** - One sentence. One act. One boundary.

How to grow Courage as a Virtue

1. **Practice small acts of bravery daily** - Speak up kindly. Tell the truth gently.
2. **Meditate on Christ's steadfastness** - Courage grows when fear is relativized by love.
3. **Reduce avoidance habits** - Avoidance strengthens fear; action weakens it.

II – Patience

Patience is the virtue that steadies the soul so that sorrow or interior pain does not overthrow reason or charity.

It governs **interior heaviness**, not anger.

Signs Patience is lacking:

What you feel:

- Overwhelmed, brittle, internally agitated
- Small things feel disproportionately heavy
- Persistent interior complaint or rumination

Common examples:

- Feeling constantly “at capacity”
- Irritated by minor delays or disruptions
- Feeling emotionally flooded by normal classroom or daily challenges
- Midday exhaustion turning into interior resentment
- **Impatience** is attacking (sorrow ruling the interior)

What you can do *in the moment*

1. **Name the sorrow** - “This is heavy.”
2. **Stop fighting the feeling; start governing it** - Let it exist without obeying it.
3. **Reduce interior noise** - Fewer words. Slower pace. Interior quiet.

How to grow Patience as a Virtue

1. **Accept small daily frustrations intentionally**
2. **Limit complaining (especially interiorly)**
3. **Unite sufferings to Christ** - Charity perfects patience.

III – Meekness

Meekness is the virtue that moderates anger so that it serves reason and charity rather than wounding others.

Signs Meekness is lacking

What you feel:

- Heat, edge, irritation *at someone, something, for some reason*
- Desire to snap, shame, or dominate

Examples:

- Sharp words in conflict, like shortness with students late in the day
- Defensive sarcasm
- Temptation to use humiliation
- (Vice: **Irascibility** - **uncontrolled anger** is attacking us)

What you can do *in the moment*

1. **Silence the tongue first**
2. **Name the anger internally**
3. **Delay action, not justice**

How to grow Meekness

1. **Practice gentle, uplifting speech intentionally**
2. **Limit mental replay of offenses**
3. **Cultivate humility** - Pride feeds anger; humility starves it.

IV – Holy Attack or Righteous Anger

Holy attack is the active expression of courage that confronts evil or advances the good when endurance alone is no longer sufficient.

It is **ordered action** (through Prudence and in Charity), not aggression.

Signs Righteous Anger is needed

What you feel:

- Endurance alone is enabling harm
- Silence is now cooperation
- A line must be drawn
- Keep committing the same sin and am not trying to address it

Some Examples:

- Allowing injustice to continue out of niceness
- Repeated boundary violations
- A pattern that must be stopped decisively
- Vice at work: **Passivity / false peace**

What you can do *in the moment*

1. **Act calmly if possible, but decisively**
2. **Speak truth, without heat unless necessary**
3. **Aim at restoration, not domination**

How to grow Righteous Anger

1. **Practice clear boundary-setting**
2. **Strengthen moral clarity**
3. **Contemplate Christ cleansing the Temple** – not in a rage, but premeditated (while fashioning the whip), to make a prophetic point in ending the sacrifice for a day while also driving out the corruption.

V – Patient Endurance

Patient endurance is the act of the will that remains faithful to the good when suffering tempts us to quit, flee, or withdraw. Patience can enable it, but Patient Endurance *is the choice*.

Signs Endurance is being tested

What you feel:

- Strong urge to escape, disengage, or quit - “I just want out of this.”
- Desire to abandon something good or important

Some examples:

- Wanting to quit a responsibility prematurely
- Pulling back relationally under pressure – for instance, emotional withdrawal from students due to fatigue, or in a relationship where you shouldn’t
- Temptation to lower standards mid-year
- Vice at work: **Faintheartedness**

What you can do *in the moment*

1. **Stay. Don’t flee** - Endurance begins with staying put.
2. **Choose only the next right action** - Not the whole future.
3. **Do not wait to feel better** - Act first; feelings follow.
4. **Offer the suffering to Christ with his on the Cross** for the sake of someone/something

How to grow Endurance

1. **Practice finishing what you start**
2. **Train fidelity in small discomforts**
3. **Pray explicitly for endurance and offer sufferings** (Aquinas: endurance requires grace)