

Chapter 11

The Moral Virtues

Once the various faculties of the soul are rectified in regard to the supernatural order through the theological virtues, it is necessary to rectify them in regard to the means for attaining that end. This is the role of the moral virtues. As we have already mentioned, it is impossible to enumerate all the moral virtues, since there can be a virtue wherever there can be a morally good habit regarding a given area of human activity, and human activities are multiple. However, **theologians generally group the moral virtues around the basic cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude.**

We shall limit ourselves to a discussion of the cardinal virtues and a brief exposition of some of the secondary virtues connected with them. To do more would carry us too far into the domain of moral theology.

Prudence

The first of the four cardinal virtues and the most important as a fulcrum for all the other moral virtues is prudence. It is a special virtue infused by God into the practical intellect for the right government of one's actions in view of the supernatural end. By reason of origin, infused prudence is given by God with sanctifying grace. By reason of extension or application, infused prudence governs the supernatural order. By reason of the formal motive, infused prudence operates under reason enlightened by faith and informed with charity.

Prudence is the most necessary of all the moral virtues because its function is precisely to point out and command the just mean or measure in regard to any and all human actions. **It enables us to judge accurately what is the morally good thing to do under particular circumstances.** In a certain sense, even the theological virtues come under the domain of prudence, for there are occasions and circumstances in which supernatural prudence must dictate the proper operations of faith, hope, and charity. Indeed, it can be said that, **without prudence, no other virtue can be practiced with perfection.**

The importance of the virtue of prudence is especially evident in certain aspects of human life. **First, it helps the individual avoid sin,** pointing out through experience the causes and occasions of sin as well as the opportune remedies. **Secondly, it contributes to the increase and growth of virtue,** judging in each instance what should be done or avoided in view of one's sanctification. It is sometimes difficult to judge in a given instance which of two virtues is to be practiced; for example, justice or mercy, recollection or apostolic zeal, fortitude or meekness. **Thirdly, prudence assists greatly in the works of the apostolate,** whether in the pulpit, the confessional., or elsewhere.

There are three acts involved in the functioning of prudence: deliberation, judgment, and execution. First of all, depending on the importance and the complexity of the matter, one must consider the various means for attaining an end or the various ways of performing an action. It is at this point that one needs a knowledge of principles or norms of action and at the same time the

ability to relate those principles to the case at hand, with all its existential circumstances. Once the matter has been deliberated, a judgment is made as to the proper method of action in this particular matter. Lastly, the will gives the command to carry out the decision.

Eight integral parts are required for the perfection of the virtue of prudence, five of which pertain to the speculative aspect and three to the practical aspect. Each and every part will not necessarily function in every instance of the exercise of the virtue, but all must be possessed so that they will function when particular circumstances require. The eight parts are:

1. **Memory of the past**, so that one may learn from experience what is to be done or avoided in particular circumstances.
2. **Understanding of the present**, so that one may judge whether a given action is lawful or unlawful, morally good or evil, fitting or unfitting.
3. **Docility**, so that those who lack experience may accept the counsel and advice of those who have experience.
4. **Sagacity**, so that one may act rightly in urgent cases when time or circumstances do not permit delay.
5. **Reasoning power**, so that when time permits, one may act after the required consideration and reflection.
6. **Foresight**, so that one may judge the immediate means in view of the end or goal being sought.
7. **Circumspection**, so that one may take into consideration the special circumstances surrounding a given act, as to persons and places.
8. **Precaution**, so that one will take into consideration the possible obstacles from without, or one's own weakness or incapacity in view of a given action.[\(1\)](#)

The practice of any virtue varies according to the state of perfection of the individual Christian. This is very evident in the case of prudence, which is the virtue of maturity, and hence is usually deficient in the young, due to lack of experience and the tendency to be motivated by emotions or sentiments rather than governed by reason. There are, however, certain basic practices that can be utilized for the cultivation of prudence.

Beginners in the spiritual life, whose dominant concern is to remain in the state of grace and grow in virtue, need to foster the particular characteristics just mentioned, concentrating especially on reasoning power, docility, memory of the past, foresight, circumspection, and caution. They should always reflect before acting, never postponing decisions to the last minute or being influenced unduly by passion or selfishness. They should try to project into the future in order to foresee the possible effects of their actions. They should look carefully at all the circumstances surrounding a decision or action. They should remain firm in their decisions and

conscientiously perform the duty of the moment. They should avoid all types of duplicity and craftiness and not yield to the temptation to use pretexts or rationalization to excuse themselves from their obligations or from sin. It would be very helpful for the young to have a model, if only the general example of good-living Christians. Lastly, it is helpful to evaluate all one's actions in terms of salvation: **what does this profit me toward eternal life?**

Advanced souls should still be solicitous to perfect the virtue of prudence through charity, striving to do all things for the glory of God. More and more should they try to conform to the pattern of Christ, asking what Jesus would do in a given situation. Being more immediately concerned with striving for the perfection of charity, they should conform to the higher norm of Christian living, which states that not all things that are lawful are fitting and proper for a holy Christian. Consequently, they should be more careful to avoid venial sin and the occasions of sin and should be more attentive and docile to the movements of grace and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. More and more **they should interiorize the norms of Christian living so that they have the mind of Christ guiding them in all that they do.**

Souls highly perfected in charity should dispose themselves to practice the virtue of prudence under the impulse of the gift of counsel.

The Gift of Counsel

The gift of counsel is a supernaturally infused habit by which the Holy Spirit enables one to judge rightly in particular events what ought to be done in view of the supernatural ultimate end and personal sanctification. **Whereas the virtue of prudence operates according to the dictates of reason enlightened by faith, the gift of counsel operates under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.** Thus it often commands actions for which human reason would never be able to give an explanation, nor would human reason alone, even with the light of faith, be able to come to such practical and particular judgments.

It is therefore evident that the gift of counsel is necessary in those cases in which an immediate judgment is required, but there is neither the ability nor the opportunity to make the decision under the virtue of prudence, which works always in a human mode. For example, it is at times difficult to know how to equate suavity with firmness, how to reconcile the necessity of guarding a secret with the obligation to speak the truth, the interior life with the apostolate, an affectionate love with perfect chastity. It is even more difficult for persons charged with government and administration -- in religion, in the family, in civil and economic life -- to be able at every instance to do that which is prudent. In many instances, the prudent action will have to be the result of the operation of the gift of counsel.

When the gift of counsel operates in souls, it produces marvelous effects, of which the principal ones are the following:

1. **It preserves one from the danger of a false conscience.** This is especially important for moral theologians, spiritual directors, confessors, and preachers of the Gospel.

2. **It provides the solution to many difficult and unexpected situations and problems.** If a soul is habitually faithful to grace and intent on doing all for the glory of God, the gift of counsel will frequently come into play when human reason, either alone or enlightened by faith, would be incapable of making the proper judgment. The solution may not be one that human prudence would suggest or that reason would approve, but since it comes from the Holy Spirit working through the gift, it is always the right solution.

3. **It inspires superiors with the most apt means for governing others.** Prudence is not restricted to one's personal actions but is the primary virtue required for the government of others. Great indeed is the need for a delicate sense of judgment in the problems presented in the direction and government of others. Hence the gift of counsel is often necessary for the decisions and commands to be made by the religious superior, the spiritual director, and the parents of a family.

4. **It increases one's docility to legitimate superiors.** Strange as it may seem, the gift of counsel has as one of its most wonderful effects the beautiful trait of docility. God has determined that we should be governed by superiors in all the various phases of life, and the Holy Spirit, through the gift of counsel, inspires this subjection to lawful superiors.

In addition to the general means for disposing oneself for the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, **there are special predispositions necessary for the actuation of the gift of counsel:**

1. **Profound humility**, in order to recognize one's own weakness and ignorance, and thus have recourse to the Holy Spirit for light and guidance.

2. **Reflection and patience**, realizing that in some circumstances all possible human diligence is insufficient and that the Holy Spirit alone can perform the operation in us. But we must wait upon the Lord, who will help us in his own good time,

3. **Ability to listen to God's voice**, avoiding the noise and tumult of the world as much as possible and cultivating mental prayer practiced in solitude and recollection.

4. **Docility and obedience**, for there is nothing that so prevents the Holy Spirit from operating in us as does an independent and insubordinate spirit.

Justice

The virtue of prudence is first in excellence and importance among the moral virtues, but the virtue of justice is first in the order of generation and development. The first moral lessons taught a child are lessons pertaining to justice, rights, and duties.

As an infused virtue justice is a supernatural habit that inclines the will constantly and perpetually to render to each one that which is due strictly.⁽²⁾ We say that justice is a constant and perpetual disposition of the will because a habit requires more than an occasional act of virtue. This virtue, moreover, perfects the will and not the intellect, for it pertains to the practical order of regulating one's relations with one's neighbors. Further, it pertains to those things due to

another in the strict sense, unlike the virtues of charity, affability, and gratitude, which are based on a certain fittingness and not on a strict obligation. Hence for strict justice there must always be present: reference to another, strict obligation, and exact adequation (neither more nor less than what is due).

After prudence, justice is the most excellent of all the moral virtues, although it is inferior to the theological virtues and even to the annexed virtue of religion. Its importance in both personal and social life is evident. It puts things in their right order and thus prepares the way for true peace, which St. Augustine defines as the tranquillity of order, and Scripture defines as the work of justice.

In every kind of justice two things are required in order that one may be called just in the full sense of the word: to refrain from evil toward one's neighbor and society, and to do the required good for one's neighbor and society. These two aspects are, therefore, the *integral parts* without which perfect justice is impossible.

The close connection between the integral parts of justice and the first law of morality (do good; avoid evil) makes it evident that justice is essential for even natural human perfection. It is likewise required as the foundation for the perfection of charity, since it would be a strange paradox for an individual to attempt to operate according to the higher standard of charity while completely ignoring the demands of justice.

Moreover, justice is not a purely negative virtue, not merely a matter of refraining from evil toward one's neighbor or from violating the neighbor's rights. It requires, on the one hand, a rejection of such evil and, on the other hand, the faithful fulfillment of those obligations to which we are bound by various kinds of laws. And although it is generally true that it would be more serious to do evil than to omit doing the good to which we are obliged, **in certain cases the sin of omission against justice is more serious by far than a sin of commission.**

The virtue of justice admits of three species: legal justice, distributive justice, and commutative justice.

Legal justice is the virtue that inclines the members of a society to render to that society what is due in view of the common good or goal of the society. **It is called legal because it is based upon, and determined by, the laws of the society in question,** which laws bind in conscience if they are just. And since the common good of society normally takes precedence over the particular good of any member of society, justice sometimes requires that the individual relinquish personal goods in view of the well-being of the society as a whole.

Distributive justice is the virtue that inclines the person in charge of the distribution of goods or favors in a society to bestow these things proportionately, according to the dignity, merits, or needs of each one. Although the titles of justice may vary with the goods or the persons involved, distributive justice works on the principle of rendering to each what is his or her due. Thus **the distribution of goods should be according to the needs of each person, and the bestowal of favors or offices should be according to the merits or abilities of each one.** And although one may think that justice is measurable in mathematical equality, when it is a question

of distributive justice it is rather a question of proportion, with the result that strict equality of distribution would often be an injustice rather than a justice.

Commutative justice is justice in the fullest sense of the word, since it has to do with the rights and duties of individual persons among themselves. It coincides almost exactly with the definition of justice itself: **the constant and perpetual will of one individual person to render to another individual what is due in strict equality. Hence its transgression always involves the obligation to make restitution.**

The potential parts of justice are those related virtues connected with justice by reason of one or another of its elements, namely, something owed to another by a strict obligation and in some measure of equality. On the other hand, these annexed virtues lack something of the perfect concept of justice, and for that reason they do not have the full force of justice. They are divided into two groups: those that are not measured in terms of strict equality, and those that are not based on the title of a strict right. **The general means of fostering the virtue of justice are the following:**

1. **Avoid even the slightest injustice.** It is extremely easy to forth a false conscience in the matter of justice, saying that one or another moral law has no importance. Granted that there may be smallness of matter in many instances, the evils to be sedulously avoided are the cultivation of a disdain for little things because they are little, and losing sight of the frequency of small injustices that pave the way for a more serious fall.
2. **Never contract debts without necessity and pay one's debts promptly.** This is an excellent ascetical practice, namely, to learn to do without things that of themselves are not necessities. And when necessary debts have been contracted, the most important duty is to pay those debts owed in justice before contracting new ones.
3. **Treat the possessions of others as carefully as one's own.** Whether it be a question of things rented for use or shared in the family or religious community, it is common to find a lack of regard for the possessions of others. It is often the sign of selfishness if we assume the attitude that what is not ours need not be cared for.
4. **Do not harm the good name of another.** One's good name is of much greater value than created goods, and yet it is often the least respected. How frequently it is said that a certain fault of another is common knowledge and therefore there is no need to refrain from discussing it. Even worse is the frequency of rash judgment, ridicule, contumely, defamation. One must always speak the truth when one speaks, but this does not mean that one always has the right to reveal the faults of others. Both in private conversation and in modern newspapers and magazines, many sins are committed against justice in this matter.
5. **Avoid acceptance of persons,** which means favoring them without sufficient reason or denying them their lawful rights. This is a sin against, distributive justice; it is committed not only in civil society but even in some ecclesiastical and religious communities. **The basic rule that should determine the distribution of offices and honors and the application of punishments should be simply to give to each individual what the merits or faults require in**

justice. As regards the distribution or assignment of offices, the objective consideration should usually be conclusive, namely, what does the given position or office require, and which person has the capacity and talents to fulfill the task? **One of the surest safeguards of peace and harmony in any community or society is distributive justice on the part of the authorities or superiors.**

Particular means for growing in justice can be listed under the headings of the three species of justice:

1. **Legal justice**. In a certain sense, the members of a society are also the servants and stewards of that society. Every society has its common good or goal protected by the laws leading to the attainment of that goal. In this sense, therefore, all members of a society are bound in legal justice to comply with the laws that further the common good. **Any movement of separatism or rebellion, is destructive of the society as such. Thus the citizens of a state, the members of the Church, the children in a family, and the religious in a religious institute should fulfill their obligations to the society to which they belong.** They should be conscientious in fulfilling the laws of the society as perfectly as possible, unless special circumstances honestly allow for a dispensation or exemption.

2. **Distributive justice**. Superiors are administrators or stewards in the eyes of God. Even more, they are the servants of those they govern. The common good of a society or community must be preserved at all costs, and this common good is not necessarily the selfish good of the majority or a minority; it is the good or goal for which the society exists. Consequently, superiors should always judge in favor of the society as a whole, and in the distribution of goods or offices they **should seek the individuals who will best contribute to that same common good of the society.**

3. **Commutative justice**: To give to each his own is a basic rule for the observance of commutative justice. Nothing is small in the eyes of God, and everything good can be an occasion for growth in grace and holiness. One of the severest blows we can deliver to our own self-love is to maintain a delicate sense of justice toward each of our fellow beings. This is not an area of like or dislike, of taste or feeling, but simply **of doing what we are supposed to do, regardless of any other consideration.**

Although it belongs to special moral theology to discuss and examine the various virtues in particular, there are certain virtues annexed to justice that are so essential to growth in Christian perfection that they demand treatment in any book on the theology of Christian perfection. For that reason, we single out those virtues having a special importance for those who are striving for the perfection of the Christian life and suggest that the reader refer to books on moral theology for a study of the remaining annexed virtues.

Religion

The virtue of religion is a moral virtue that inclines us to give to God the worship due him as the first principle of all things. It is the most important of all the virtues derived from justice, and in perfection it surpasses all the other moral virtues, including justice itself. This is by reason

of the excellence of its object, which is the worship of God, and in this sense it closely approaches the theological virtues.

Religion has various acts, both internal and external. The internal acts are devotion and prayer. The primary external acts are adoration, sacrifice, and vows. A detailed study of vows belongs in moral theology, and the remaining external acts -- offerings, tithes, oaths, adjuration, and praise -- are not of immediate importance in spiritual theology.[\(3\)](#)

Devotion consists in a promptness of will for giving oneself to the things pertaining to the service of God. Hence those who in some way devote themselves to God and remain completely subject to him are called devout. The essential characteristic of devotion is promptness of will, ever disposed to give itself to the things that pertain to God's service.

How, then, is the virtue of religion distinguished in this respect from the virtue of charity? Charity arouses devotion because love makes us prompter for the service of the one we love; devotion increases charity because friendship is preserved and increased by our services for our friend.

St. Thomas remarks that, as an act of religion, **devotion always is directed to God and not to his creatures. Hence devotion to the saints should not terminate in the saints themselves, but it should pass through them to God.** We venerate in the saints that which they have of God, that is to say, we venerate God in them. It is evident from this how mistaken those persons are who attach their devotion, not only to particular saint as an end in itself, but even to some particular image of a saint, without which they would have no devotion whatever. Priests and other persons who are entrusted with directing the piety of the faithful should instruct the faithful and correct abuses.

The principal extrinsic cause of devotion is God, who calls those he wishes and inflames in their hearts the fire of devotion. But the intrinsic cause so far as it pertains to us is meditation on the divine goodness and the benefits received from God, together with the consideration of our misery, which impels us to subject ourselves completely to God. The most proper effect of devotion is to fill the soul with spiritual joy.

Prayer is the second interior act of the virtue of religion[121](#). Unlike devotion, which is localized in the will, prayer pertains properly to both the intellect and the will. By reason of its extraordinary importance in the spiritual life, we shall dedicate an entire chapter to this matter (see Chapter 12).

Adoration is an external act of the virtue of religion by which we express the honor and reverence due to the divine excellence. Exterior adoration is an expression and an overflow of interior adoration, which is primary, and serves at the same time to arouse and preserve interior adoration. And because God is in all places, we can adore God both internally and externally in all places, although the most proper place is in his temple, because he resides there in a special manner. Moreover, the very atmosphere of a church or chapel helps to withdraw us from the noise and distractions of the world, while many holy objects contained there serve to arouse devotion, and the presence of other worshipers likewise nourishes the spirit of adoration.

Sacrifice is the principal act of the external and public worship of God. It consists in the external offering of a sensible thing, together with a real change or destruction of the thing, effected by the priest in honor of God, as a testimony of his supreme dominion and our complete submission to him.

A vow is a free and deliberate promise made to God concerning some good that is possible and better than its contrary. When made under the proper conditions, it is an excellent act of religion, which increases the merit of our good works by directing us to the worship and honor of God. By the same token, the voluntary transgression of a vow is a sin against religion, and if it pertains to a matter already forbidden by precept, it constitutes a second sin and must be declared as such in confession. If the vows that are broken pertain to a person publicly consecrated to God, the sin committed against religion is a sacrilege. Such is not the case, however, with the breaking of a private vow, although it would surely be a grave sin against the virtue of religion -- of infidelity to God -- and would have to be declared explicitly in confession.

Piety

The word piety can be used in various senses: (1) as a synonym for **devotion**, a religious spirit, the attention to things that pertain to the worship of God (thus we speak of pious or devout persons); (2) as signifying **compassion or mercy**, and thus we may say: "O Lord, have pity (piety) on us"; (3) as designating **a special virtue derived from justice**, the virtue of piety, which we treat here; (4) as referring to **one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit**: the gift of piety.

As a special virtue derived from justice, piety is defined as a supernatural habit that inclines us to render to our parents, our country, and to all those connected with them the reverence and services due them. The material object of this virtue consists in all the acts of honor, reverence, service, and material or spiritual aid that are given to one's parents and relatives and country. The formal motive of these acts is that one's parents and country are the secondary principle of one's being and government. To God, as the first principle, is owed the special worship given him by the virtue of religion. To one's parents and country, as secondary principles, is owed the special reverence of the virtue of piety.

Accordingly, the virtue of piety has three different subjects to whom the debts of piety are owed:

- (1) **one's parents**, to whom this virtue refers primarily, because after God they are the principles of one's being, education, and government;
- (2) **one's country**, because that also is, in a certain sense, a principle of our being, education, and government insofar as it furnishes our parents -- and through them, us -- with a multitude of things that are necessary or helpful;
- (3) **one's blood relatives** because, although they are not the principle of our being and government, nevertheless our parents are in some way represented in them, since all proceed from the same family tree. By extension one can also consider as relatives those who form part of the same spiritual family, for example, the members of a religious order, who call the founder their father or mother.

From what has been said, it should be evident that the virtue of piety is distinct from other virtues resembling it, for example, charity toward one's neighbor and legal justice. Piety is distinguished from fraternal charity inasmuch as piety is based on the intimate union resulting from the same family tree, while charity is based on the bonds uniting the whole human race with God. Again, piety for one's country is distinguished from legal justice in the sense that the latter relates to one's country as a common good for all the citizens, while piety considers one's country as a secondary principle of one's own being.

Observance

The virtue of observance is a supernatural habit regulating one's relationships to superiors other than God, parents, and civil authority (which belong to religion and piety respectively). By means of observance we give reverence and honor to those who possess a special dignity or authority and hence are deserving of respect. Persons who have positions of dignity deserve honor by reason of their excellence; they deserve obedience from their subjects or inferiors by reason of the authority of their office or position. Thus, **the virtue of observance is divided into two parts: honor and obedience; we shall discuss only the virtue of obedience.**(4)

Obedience

Obedience is an infused moral virtue that makes one's will prompt to fulfill the commands of a superior. The command may be verbal or written, but it may also be simply the explicit or tacit manifestation of the will of the superior. The obedience will be the more perfect as the individual is prompter to execute the will of the superior even before an express command is given. All subjects of all legitimate superiors are obliged to obey authority, whether that authority be one's parents, the civil officials, the pastor in a parish, the teacher in a classroom, a military officer, one's employer. However, **we are not allowed to obey authority in matters that are unlawful, nor may we obey in matters involving sin or the proximate occasion of sin.**

If one externally performs the act that has been commanded by a superior, but does so with internal rebellion, the obedience is purely material and is not a virtue in the strict sense of the word. Nevertheless, even material obedience suffices to avoid breaking the vow of obedience in case the subject is bound by vow. **But when one obeys both internally and externally, the obedience is then called formal obedience and is an excellent act of virtue.**

As a virtue, obedience is inferior to the theological virtues. By reason of its object it is also inferior to some of the moral virtues (e.g., religion). But by reason of that which is sacrificed or offered to God, it is the most excellent of all the moral virtues because through the other virtues one sacrifices external goods (poverty), corporal goods (virginity), or certain goods of the soul that are inferior to the human will, which is sacrificed in the virtue of obedience. For this reason **St. Thomas does not hesitate to affirm that the religious life, primarily because of the vow of obedience, is a true sacrifice offered to God.**(5)

The classical division of the grades or degrees of obedience is as follows: (a) mere external execution; (b) voluntary obedience; and (c) submission of the judgment. St. Ignatius Loyola

explains these grades in a letter to the fathers and brothers of the Society in Portugal.⁽⁶⁾ The following outline gives the basic points of doctrine contained in the letter.

1. St. Ignatius desires that obedience should be the characteristic virtue of the Society because of the blessings produced by this virtue, because it is highly praised in Sacred Scripture, and because ***it is the compendium of all the other virtues***. He states as the fundamental principle of obedience that one should see Christ in the superior, without thinking of the superior as an individual person.

2. ***Listing the grades of obedience, he states that the first is obedience of execution, which is of little value; the second grade is obedience of the will***, which possesses the intrinsic value of the sacrifice of obedience, so that it is of great merit and it perfects man's free will; the third degree is ***obedience of the intellect***. As regards obedience of the intellect, St. Ignatius states that it is *possible* because the will can control the intellect; it is *just* because it is reasonable to control one's judgment and to conform one's will to God's; it is necessary for the attainment of perfect subordination, for safeguarding oneself against the illusions of self-love, for preserving one's tranquillity in obedience, and for preserving union with God; and it is ***perfect obedience***, because in this grade of obedience a man immolates that which is most excellent, which implies a marvelous victory over self.

3. Then the Saint lists the general and particular means for achieving the third grade of obedience. The general means are humility and meekness. ***The particular means are to see God in one's superiors, to seek reasons in favor of the command that is given, and to accept the command blindly, that is, without any further inquiry, but with a docility similar to that which one should have in regard to matters of faith***. This does not mean, however, that it would be opposed to the perfection of obedience if one were to state reasons to the superior for making a change in what has been commanded, so long as due conditions are observed. However, if a subject should make such a representation to his superior, he should do so with complete indifference and with full freedom.

4. In his final observation, St. Ignatius remarks that ***obedience also extends to those who have some charge or office under lawful authority***. And he says that the prosperity of religious institutes depends on obedience because of the principle of subordination that applies to religious institutes. In his final exhortation he refers to the example of Christ in regard to obedience and the great reward that is earned through obedience.

The fundamental quality comprising all the others is that obedience should be supernatural, that is, inspired by supernatural motives. Only then is obedience a truly Christian virtue. Obedience inspired by any purely human motive, however right and lawful in itself, cannot be supernatural. But in order that the supernatural quality of obedience may be augmented and preserved, we shall enumerate some of the more important characteristics of Christian obedience. We do not imply that this list is exhaustive, but if we keep in mind the fundamental quality we have just mentioned, all the other characteristics of obedience will spring forth spontaneously.

1. ***A spirit of faith***, by which the subject obeys and reveres a superior as another Christ, and looks upon the commands of the superior as coming from God.

2. The **firm conviction** that by obeying lawful commands of superiors we are fulfilling the will of God, and that, although a superior may make a mistake in commanding, the subject never makes a mistake in obeying lawful commands.
3. **Obedience out of love of God** and acceptance of difficult or distasteful commands in a spirit of sacrifice.
4. **Promptness in fulfilling the commands that are given**, realizing that we should not make Christ wait for our obedience but that we should be prompt to do his will.
5. **Spontaneity in obedience**, and even the attempt to anticipate the desires of the superior.
6. **Humility and simplicity**, so that we can perform the act of obedience as if it were the most natural thing in the world, without giving any attention to the difficulties involved.
7. **Magnanimity**, which gives virility to our obedience and provides us with the energy of heroes and the fortitude of martyrs.
8. **Universality**, so that at all times and to any superior whatever, we obey all commands without exception.
9. **Perseverance**, so that in time of joy or sorrow, in health or in sickness, regardless of any personal condition or taste, we would obey, realizing that obedience gives power and that the obedient person shall speak of victory.

Gratitude

The virtue of gratitude has as its object the recompense, in some way, of a benefactor for some benefit that has been received. The benefactor, in giving us a gift to which we had no strict right, merits our gratitude, and in every noble heart the need to demonstrate this gratitude spontaneously springs forth when the occasion offers. On the other hand, the sin of ingratitude is a vile and ugly sin. Both gratitude and its opposite vice admit of various degrees, as St. Thomas states in the following summary:

[Gratitude] has various degrees which correspond in their order to the thing required for gratitude. The first is to recognize the favor received, the second is to express one's appreciation and thanks, and the third is to repay the favor at a suitable place and time according to one's means. And since the last in the order of generation is first in the order of destruction, it follows that the first degree of ingratitude is to fail to repay a favor, the second is to decline to notice and acknowledge that one has received a favor, and the third and supreme degree is to fail to recognize the reception of a favor, whether by forgetting it or in any other way. Moreover, since an affirmation implies the opposite negation, it follows that it belongs to the first degree of ingratitude to return evil for good, to the second degree to find fault with a favor received, and to the third degree to esteem kindness as though it were unkindness.[\(7\)](#)

Veracity

The virtue of veracity inclines one always to speak the truth and to manifest externally what one is internally. This virtue is closely related to simplicity, which rectifies one's intention and preserves one against duplicity. It is also related to fidelity, which inclines the will to fulfill what has been promised.

We are not always obliged to speak the truth, but we are always obliged not to lie. When charity, justice, or some other virtue requires that we should not reveal the truth, it will then be necessary to find some way of not revealing it (silence, mental reservation), but it is never lawful directly and positively to tell a lie. **Nor does a great good that would result from a lie make the telling of the lie licit.**

Affability

Affability is the social virtue par excellence, and one of the most exquisite manifestations of the true Christian spirit. It is defined as a virtue by which our words and external actions are directed to the preservation of friendly and agreeable association with others. Although it may seem at first glance that this virtue is nothing more than the external sign of friendship, there is this great difference between them: true friendship proceeds from love, and among Christians it should be a natural result of love of neighbor; **affability, on the other hand, is a kind of friendliness that consists in words or deeds in our relations with others, requiring us to conduct ourselves in a friendly and sociable manner with all our neighbors,** whether they be intimate friends or strangers.

There are numerous acts or manifestations of the virtue of affability, and all of them arouse sympathy and friendliness in our neighbors. Benignity, politeness, simple praise, indulgence, sincere gratitude, hospitality, patience, meekness, and refinement in words and deeds exert a kind of attraction difficult to resist. This precious virtue is of extreme importance, not only in one's association with friends, neighbors, and strangers, but in a special way within the circle of one's own family, where it is often most neglected.

Equity

This virtue inclines us, in special circumstances, to depart from the letter of the law in order to observe better its spirit. The very weakness of a law lies in the fact that it looks to the preservation of the common good in a general way and cannot apply to every particular case. Legislators usually look to what commonly happens when they are framing laws, and yet they realize that there can be and usually will be exceptions. What is of great importance in this matter of the application and interpretation of laws is the preservation of the spirit of the law by **understanding the motive and circumstances that made the law necessary.** Whether it be a matter of interpreting the law promulgated by authority or the application of the law in a given situation, **one should know the mind of the legislator in framing the law.**

A good rule of thumb would consist in asking what the lawmaker would decide in circumstances that make the observance of the law onerous, or when there is a conflict of several laws.

The virtuous person will always desire to do what is in accordance with right reason, charity, and the common good. Such persons will understand that no law binds anyone in circumstances that make observance of the law impossible. Superiors of all kinds should always remember that we do not live according to laws, but according to the Spirit. If superiors sincerely endeavor to listen to the Spirit, they will know when to make prudent adjustments and adaptations or even dispense entirely from a particular law.

The Gift of Piety

The gift of piety is a supernatural habit infused with sanctifying grace, which arouses in the will, through the motion of the Holy Spirit, a filial love for God as Father, and a sentiment of universal love for all men and women as our brothers and sisters and as children of the same heavenly Father. The virtue of piety is an affective gift, and therefore it is radicated in the will in union with the other infused virtues also localized in the will. What is formal and proper in the gift of piety and distinguishes it from the virtue of religion, which venerates God as Creator or as the First Principle of everything that exists, is that it considers God as a Father who has engendered us in the supernatural life, giving us a physical and formal participation in his divine nature. In this sense, **God is truly our Father, and the worship we give him as Father through the gift of piety is nobler and more excellent than that which we give him by the virtue of religion.**

The principal secondary effect of the gift of piety is the sentiment of universal brotherhood with all others. St. Thomas expressly states that, just as through the virtue of piety we offer worship and veneration not only to our own parents but also to all blood relatives so far as they are related to the parents, so also **the gift of piety is not restricted to the love and veneration of God, but extends to all so far as they are related to God.**

The gift of piety perfects to a heroic degree the matter that falls under the virtue of justice and the other virtues related to justice, especially those of religion and piety. What a great difference there is, for example, in the worship of God only under the impulse of the virtue of religion, which presents God to us as Creator and sovereign Lord, from the same worship under the movement of the gift of piety, which enables us to see God as a most loving Father! And as regards one's association with others, how much more exquisite is the affection we show to our neighbors when we realize that they are our brothers and sisters, children of the same heavenly Father.

Even as regards material things, the gift of piety can change one's outlook completely. For those who are governed by the gift of piety, the world and all creation are considered as the house of the Father, and everything in the universe becomes a testimony of his infinite goodness. Such persons are able to discover the religious meaning hidden in all things.

The following are the principal effects produced in the soul by the actuation of the gift of piety:

1. **It places in the soul a truly filial love for our heavenly Father.** This is the primary and fundamental effect of the gift of piety. The soul understands perfectly and experiences with

ineffable sweetness the words of St. Paul: "You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption through which we cry out, 'Abba!' (that is, 'Father'). The Spirit himself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16).

2. **It enables us to adore the ineffable mystery of the divine paternity within the Trinity.** In its most sublime manifestations the gift of piety makes us penetrate the mystery of the intimate life of God by giving us a most vivid awareness of the divine paternity of the Father in relation to the Word. It is now no longer a question merely of his spiritual fatherhood of us through grace, but of his divine paternity that is eternally fruitful in the bosom of the Trinity. In view of this eternal and ever actual generation within the Trinity, **the soul is impelled to be silent and to love, without any other language than that of adoration and tears.** It is an adoration of God for his own sake and without any consideration of the benefits the soul has received from him.

3. **It arouses in the soul a filial confidence in the heavenly Father.** Intimately penetrated with the sentiment of its adoptive divine filiation, the soul abandons itself calmly and confidently to the heavenly Father. It is not preoccupied with any care, and nothing is capable of disturbing its unalterable peace, even for an instant. The soul asks nothing and rejects nothing. It is not concerned about health or sickness, a long life or a short life, consolations or aridity, persecution or praise, activity or idleness. It is completely submissive to the will of God and seeks only to glorify God with all its powers, desiring that all beings should realize their adoptive divine filiation and live as true children of God. **There is nothing rigid or complicated in their spiritual life or practices of piety that could paralyze the impulses of the heart. These souls run to God as a child runs to its Father.**

4. **It causes us to see in our neighbors children of God and brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.** This is a natural consequence of our adoptive filiation through grace. If God is our Father, we are all children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ, **either actually or potentially.** Souls under the impulse of the gift of piety dedicate themselves to the works of mercy for the unfortunate and look upon them as true brothers and sisters, serving them in order to please the Father of all. They see in each of their brethren Christ, their brother, and they do for their neighbor what they would do for Christ. And whatever works they perform, even those that require heroism, seem so natural and easy to them that they would be greatly surprised if anyone should consider them to be heroic. In their amazement, they would perhaps reply: "But he is my brother!" It is this same piety that caused St. Paul to be afflicted with the afflicted, to weep with those who wept, and to bear the weaknesses and miseries of his neighbor for the purpose of saving all (1 Cor. 9:1922).

5. **It moves us to love all those persons and things that are related to the Fatherhood of God and the Christian brotherhood.** The gift of piety perfects and intensifies the soul's filial love for the Blessed Virgin, whom it considers as a tender Mother in whom it has the confidence that any child has in its mother. The soul loves the angels and the saints, whom it considers as brothers and sisters who are now enjoying the continual presence of God in heaven; it has a tender affection for the souls in purgatory, whom it assists by frequent suffrages; reverence for the Pope as a Vicar of Christ on earth, visible head of the Church and father of all Christians. It looks upon all lawful superiors as fathers and mothers-and endeavors to obey them with filial joy. In regard to its country, it would wish to see the spirit of Christ manifested in its laws and customs.

It has a deep veneration for Sacred Scripture and reads the revealed word of God as if it were a letter sent from heaven by the heavenly Father. It has a respect for all holy things, and especially those articles used as instruments in the service and worship of God.

In addition to the general means of disposing oneself for the activity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as recollection, prayer, and fidelity to grace, **the following practices are more immediately related to the gift of piety.**

1. **To cultivate the spirit of adopted children of God.** We could never insist too much on the necessity of cultivating the spirit of filial trust and abandonment to our heavenly Father. God is our Creator and will be our Judge at the moment of death, but he is always and above all our Father.

The gift of fear arouses in us a respectful reverence for God, but this is in no way incompatible with the tenderness and filial confidence inspired in us by the gift of piety. We should constantly beg for the spirit u: adoption, and should endeavor to do all things for the love of God in order to please our heavenly Father.

2. **To cultivate the spirit of universal kinship toward all humanity.** This is, as we have seen, the principal secondary effect of the gift of piety. We should strive ever to increase the capacity of our love so that we may embrace the whole world with the arms of love. We are all children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ. With what persuasive insistence St. Paul repeated this truth to the early Christians: "There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal..3:28). If we would do as much as we could to treat our neighbors as true brothers and sisters in God, we would undoubtedly attract to ourselves his merciful glance, which is delighted in nothing so much as in seeing us united in his divine Son. Christ himself desired that the world should know that we are his disciples by the love we have for each other:

3. **To consider all things, even material things, as pertaining to the house of God.** What a profoundly religious sense is discovered in all things by those souls that are ruled by the gift of piety! St. Francis of Assisi is an example of those souls who saw and judged all things in this visible world as belonging in some way to the heavenly Father.

Although many souls do not attain the exquisite delicacy of the spirit of piety as manifested in these souls, how differently they could evaluate created things if they would strive to discover the religious meaning hidden - deep within them. **The created universe is truly the house of the Father, and all things in it belong to him. If one could live in this world with this religious sense and appreciation of created things, the things themselves as vestiges of God could lead the soul to greater union with God.**

4. **To cultivate the spirit of complete abandonment to God.** We will not attain this spirit perfectly until the gift of piety is intensely actuated in us, but we should try to do what we can to cultivate total abandonment to God. We should strive to remain indifferent in regard to the shortness or the length of our life, consolation or dryness in our spiritual life, and the many other questions that could cause us concern or anxiety. Our basic attitude should be that of complete

filial abandonment to the divine will of our heavenly Father. Since we know for certain that he loves us as a father and that he cares for us even in our daily needs, it should not be too difficult for us **to do the best we can in our daily life and to leave in his hands those things that are beyond our power.**

Temperance

The word temperance can be employed to signify either the moderation that reason imposes on every human act of passion, in which case it is not a special virtue but a general condition that should characterize all the moral virtues, or **a special virtue among the moral virtues.** As a moral virtue, temperance is a supernatural habit that moderates the inclination to sense pleasures and keeps them within the limits of reason illumined by faith.

We refer to temperance as a supernatural habit in order to distinguish it from the natural or acquired virtue of temperance. The proper function of temperance is to refrain or control the movements of the concupiscent appetite in which it resides, as distinct from the virtue of fortitude, which controls the irascible appetite. Although temperance should moderate all the sense pleasures to which the concupiscent appetite is drawn, it refers in a special way to the pleasures of taste and touch, because they provide the most intense sense delectation and are, therefore, most likely to draw the appetite beyond the rule of reason. That is why the special virtue of temperance is required.

Natural or acquired temperance is regulated simply by the light of natural reason, and therefore contains or restricts the functions of the pleasure emotions within rational or purely human limits; **supernatural or infused temperance extends much further because it adds to simple reason the light of faith, which imposes superior and more delicate demands.**

The virtue of temperance is one of the most necessary virtues in the spiritual life of the individual. God has placed strong pleasure in the natural operations that are necessary for the conservation of the individual and the species. This is the reason for our strong inclination to the pleasures of taste and the sex function, which have a noble purpose intended by God as the Author of nature. But it is easy to go beyond the limits of reason and enter the area of the illicit and sinful. The infused virtue of temperance moderates and restrains those natural appetites.

The instincts, the functions, and the pleasures involved in the preservation of the individual or the species are good in themselves and have a noble purpose. Consequently, it is not a question of annihilating or completely suppressing these instincts, but of regulating their use according to the rule of reason, the light of faith, and one's particular vocation and circumstances of life. The infused virtue of temperance enables the individual to use these functions and enjoy their concomitant pleasures for an honest and supernatural end.

There are two integral parts assigned to the virtue of temperance: a sense of shame and a sense of honor. The **sense of shame** is not a virtue in the strict sense of the word, but a praiseworthy emotion or feeling that causes us to fear the disgrace and confusion or embarrassment connected with a base action. It is an emotion because it is usually accompanied by a change in the body, such as blushing; it is praiseworthy because the fear, regulated by

reason, arouses an aversion to anything that is base and degrading. It should be noted that we are more ashamed of being embarrassed before wise and virtuous persons -- by reason of the rectitude of their judgment and the worth of their esteem -- than before those who have little education or virtue. Above all, we have a feeling of shame and a fear of embarrassment before our friends and the members of our own family, who know us better and with whom we have to live; with strangers the sense of shame is much weaker.

The **sense of honor** signifies a certain love or appreciation for the spiritual beauty and dignity connected with the practice of temperance. It is properly connected with the virtue of temperance because this virtue possesses a certain degree of spiritual beauty, and the beautiful is opposed to the base and ugly. Therefore a sense of honor pertains to the virtue that helps us to avoid base and ugly actions. **The importance of cultivating a sense of honor can hardly be overemphasized, since sense pleasures readily lead to excess.**

One should not, however, lose sight of the fact that the sense of honor and the sense of shame would cease to be virtuous if they were understood to forbid the lawful and reasonable use of the sex instinct. Their purpose as elements or parts of the virtue of temperance is to moderate the enjoyment of lawful sense pleasures and thus enable the individual to enjoy them in a manner in keeping with human and Christian dignity.

Since the virtue of temperance has for its purpose the moderation of the inclination to the pleasures proceeding from taste and touch, its species can be divided into two groups: those that refer to the sense of taste (abstinence and sobriety), and those that refer to the sense of touch (chastity, purity, virginity, and continence).

Abstinence

This virtue inclines one to the moderate consumption of nourishment according to the dictates of reason enlightened by faith. As an infused supernatural virtue, abstinence is very different from the acquired virtue of the same name. The latter is governed by the light of natural reason alone, and uses nourishment in the degree and measure required by the needs or health of the body. But the infused virtue of abstinence likewise takes into account one's needs in the supernatural order, as when one observes a penitential fast.

Sobriety

In general, sobriety signifies moderation or temperance in any matter, but in the strict sense it is a special virtue that has for its object the moderation of the use of intoxicating drinks in accordance with reason enlightened by faith. The use of nonintoxicating drinks is regulated by the virtue of abstinence; its excess constitutes gluttony. Intoxicating drinks are the object of a special virtue because of the rapidity with which they may cause the loss of self-control and the ease with which one can form the habit of drinking to excess. When moderated by the virtue of sobriety, however, the use of intoxicating beverages is not only lawful but may also be an act of virtue in given circumstances. The use of intoxicating drinks is not evil in itself, as some have tried to maintain, but it may become evil by reason of some special circumstance.

Chastity

This is the virtue that moderates the desire for venereal pleasures according to the necessities of life as judged by right reason illumined by faith. The use and enjoyment of the sexual function in accordance with the married state are both lawful and virtuous, but even those persons for whom this action is lawful have an obligation to observe conjugal chastity. For those who are not married there is a strict prohibition against the use and enjoyment of the sexual powers; this is restricted to the married state.

Purity

Purity moderates the external acts that of their nature lead to, and prepare for, sexual union. Whereas chastity is concerned with the sexual act itself, purity is directed to certain circumstances related to chastity. Purity, like all the parts of temperance, must be judged according to the rights and duties of one's state in life according to the dictates of right reason illumined by faith. In other words, the practice of purity for married persons will be different from the purity required of the unmarried.

Virginity

As a special virtue, distinct from and more perfect than chastity, virginity consists in the resolute will to preserve one's integrity of body by abstaining perpetually from all voluntary venereal pleasure. Perfect virginity voluntarily preserved for a supernatural motive is not only lawful but in itself is more excellent than matrimony. This is exemplified in the lives of Jesus and Mary, who are models of sanctity. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from the superiority of the state of virginity to the superiority of individuals who have vowed virginity, because **spiritual excellence is measured in terms of charity, not virginity.**

Continence

This virtue strengthens the will in order to resist the disordered vehemence of the passions. It prevents evil by a disposition of the will that restrains the impetus of passion. Perfect chastity controls the passions to such an extent that they do not produce any vehement movements contrary to reason; continence, on the other hand, resists the urge of passion when it arises, and thus a continent person may be subject to violent movements of passion. The proper material of the virtue of continence is the pleasures of the sense of touch, especially those connected with sex, although in a more general and less proper sense it can refer to other movements of passion.

Meekness

The virtue of meekness has as its object the moderation of anger in accordance with right reason. Although it is listed as a potential part of the virtue of temperance, meekness resides in the irascible appetite because it is concerned with restraining anger. As a passion, **anger in itself is neither good nor evil, and therefore there is such a thing as just anger.** The virtue of meekness is, therefore, not a purely negative habit; its purpose is to **enable an individual to use anger according to the rule of right reason.**

Moreover, ***it would be a caricature of virtue to confuse meekness with timidity or cowardice.*** The meek do not lose the virtue when they give expression to just anger, any more than Jesus ceased to be meek when in anger he drove the merchants from the temple.

Indeed, if we were to fail to utilize anger on the occasions that demand it, we could be guilty of a sin against justice or charity -virtues more excellent than meekness. But since it is easy to be mistaken in judging the just motives of anger, we must always be vigilant lest we be overtaken by a sudden movement of passion that would carry us beyond the limits of justice and charity. In case of doubt it is always better to incline to the side of meekness than to the danger of excessive rigor.

Clemency

Clemency inclines a person in authority to mitigate a punishment for a fault so far as right reason allows. It proceeds from a certain gentleness of soul that causes one to abhor anything that would cause sorrow or pain to another. **Clemency does not refer to a complete and total pardon but to a mitigation of the punishment.** It should not be exercised for unworthy motives, such as respect of persons or the desire to be liked, but it should be motivated by an indulgence and kindness that will not compromise the demands of justice.

Humility

This is one of the fundamental virtues in the spiritual life. It is a virtue derived from temperance, and it enables us to restrain the inordinate desire for our own excellence, giving us a true evaluation of our smallness and misery before God. **Humility derives from temperance because its proper function is to moderate the desire for our own greatness, and all moderation belongs to the virtue of temperance. Based as it is on self-knowledge, true humility enables us to see ourselves as we are in the eyes of God, not exaggerating our good qualities and not denying the gifts we have received from God.** This virtue, therefore, implies our subjection to God, and for that reason St. Augustine attributes the gift of fear to the perfection of the virtue of humility.

How is it possible for persons who have received great gifts from God to recognize these gifts and at the same time be aware of their littleness and misery before God? St. Thomas answers this question by pointing out that we may consider two things in ourselves, namely, **that which we have of God and that which we have of ourselves. Whatever pertains to defect and imperfection is of ourselves; whatever pertains to man's goodness and perfection is from God.**

It is, therefore, the comparison with the infinite perfections of God that constitutes the ultimate basis and foundation of humility. For that reason this virtue is closely related to the theological virtues and possesses a certain aspect of reverence for God, which relates it to the virtue of religion. In the light of this basic principle, one can understand the apparently exaggerated humility of the saints and the incomparable humility of Christ. As they grew in perfection, the saints received from God ever-increasing knowledge of his infinite perfections, and as a result of that knowledge they perceived with ever greater clarity the infinite abyss between the grandeur of God and their own littleness and weakness. Mary, the greatest of all God's creatures, was also the humblest.

Humility is based on truth and justice. The truth gives us a knowledge of ourselves, with the recognition that whatever good we have we have received from God; justice demands of us that we give God all honor and glory (1 Tim. 1:17). Truth requires that we recognize and admire the natural and supernatural gifts God has bestowed on us; justice demands that we glorify the giver of those gifts.

Humility is not the greatest of all the virtues. It is surpassed by the theological virtues, the intellectual virtues, and by justice. But humility is a fundamental virtue in the spiritual life, because it removes the obstacles to the reception of grace. Scripture expressly states that God resists the proud and gives his grace to the humble (James 4:6). Hence humility and faith are the two basic virtues; they constitute the foundation of the entire supernatural structure.

Various classifications of the degrees of humility have been proposed by saints and spiritual writers, but they all agree on the basic element. A familiarity with the various degrees of humility is of great help in examining oneself in regard to the principal internal and external manifestations of this virtue. **St. Bernard simplifies the degrees of humility by reducing them to three basic grades: (1) sufficient humility (to subject oneself to superiors and not to prefer oneself to one's equal); (2) abundant humility (to subject oneself to one's equals and not to prefer oneself to one's inferiors); (3) superabundant humility (to subject oneself to one's inferiors).**

The three degrees of humility described by St. Ignatius Loyola are not restricted to the virtue of humility, but refer to the selfabnegation required in the Christian life. **The following are the three degrees according to St. Ignatius:**

- (1) **necessary humility** (the humility necessary for salvation), namely, that in all things we obey the law of God, and never do anything that would involve the commission of a mortal sin;
- (2) **perfect humility**, that is, we would not care to have riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short life, so long as we can serve God so faithfully that we would not commit a deliberate venial sin for all the world;
- (3) **most perfect humility**, that is, in imitation of Christ, we prefer to be poor with Christ; to suffer opprobrium with Christ, and to be considered a fool with Christ, rather than to be wealthy or honored or considered wise by the world.

Modesty

Modesty is a virtue by which we observe proper decorum in our gestures and bodily movements, in our posture, and in the matter of dress. This virtue calls for a sense of dignity on the part of the individual and those who are in the company of that person. Ordinarily, a person is judged by externals, and for that reason any uncontrolled movements are interpreted as signs of an inordinate and unruly interior. With good reason does St. Augustine recommend in his Rule that individuals should be especially careful to observe external modesty of deportment lest they scandalize others.

Modesty of dress requires conformity to the customs of the persons with whom one lives. One may violate the requirements of modesty of dress because of vanity, sensuality, or excessive

interest in one's apparel. One can also go to the other extreme by being negligent, for example, if one were to be unreasonably negligent in dressing according to one's state in life, or were to seek attention by a deliberate flaunting of good manners.

Eutrapelia

This special virtue regulates one's recreation and diversions according to the rule of reason. In discussing this virtue, St. Thomas begins by insisting upon the necessity of spiritual and bodily relaxations in order to restore the energies and powers that have been exhausted by labor. He points out, however, that three defects in recreation must be avoided: to recreate by means of harmful or sinful things, to lose all sense of propriety or seriousness in the midst of recreation, or to do anything that would be inordinate in regard to persons, place, time, or other circumstances.[\(8\)](#)

Moderation in pleasure is especially difficult for the young and for all who quickly respond to sensate pleasure, but it is also a problem for people of all ages and conditions. Given our propensity for satisfaction on the sense level, it is understandable that one may easily go to excess in the pleasures of taste and touch. Moreover, the temptations of youth to sins against temperance will not necessarily be the same type of temptations that assail the older person, who may be more inclined to excess in food or drink than in sexual matters. For that reason one should not equate temperance with control of the sexual instinct; it applies as well to the pleasures of the palate.

The following suggestions are given with a view toward fostering the virtuous and moderate enjoyment of sensate pleasure in accordance with the demands of temperance:

1. **Avoid occasions that stimulate the desire for sensate pleasure.** Here the dictum "know thyself" is applicable since individuals vary in their sensitivity to stimuli. Moreover, one's state of life must be taken into consideration. Many things that are lawful for married adults, for example, are not so for youth or for priests and religious. Those who know from experience where their weakness lies will also know to what extent they must avoid or protect themselves against particular persons, places, or things.
2. **Practice voluntary self-denial.** One should never eat or drink to satiety but should always take less than one's capacity. The sensate appetites can become habituated to moderation just as surely as they can become accustomed to excess.
3. **Keep a vigilant control over the sense of sight, the imagination, and memory.** Many temptations arise from within the individual because of the fantasies of the imagination, which arouse desire, or because of the memory of past pleasures. In this connection, control of the sense of sight must apply not only to objects or persons looked at, but also to books, movies, magazines, and television.
4. **Occupy oneself with safe and beneficial activities.** Hence the great benefit of athletics and exercise of all kinds, of having a hobby, of fidelity to the duty of the moment. Closely related to

this is the practice of associating with persons of virtue and knowing how to enjoy wholesome recreation and relaxation.

5. **Cultivate a sense of Christian dignity and an awareness of the obligation to witness to Christ.** This is one of the strongest positive motivations for a temperate life. If we become more and more conscious of the Trinity dwelling in our souls through grace, we shall more likely live in accordance with our Christian vocation. If we are mindful of our apostolic duty to bear witness to Christ in our lives, we shall more readily refrain from all excess in sensate pleasure, as he did.

The Gift of Fear

The gift of fear of the Lord, as we have seen, corresponds primarily to the theological virtue of hope, which it perfects by motivating the individual to avoid sin out of reverential fear of God. But it pertains secondarily to the virtue of temperance because that same reverential fear prompts one to avoid those sensate excesses to which we are strongly inclined. Therefore, **the gift of fear controls the concupiscent appetite.** This, of course, is also the object of temperance and its related virtues-to moderate the use and enjoyment of sensate pleasure. But to reach the perfection of the Christian life and the most intimate possible union with God, it is necessary that the concupiscent appetite be not only controlled but also purified. Servile fear or the fear of punishment may serve frequently to prevent one from yielding to the desire for sensate pleasure, but the gift of fear, which is filial fear born of love and reverence, seeks the purity required for union with God. The gift of fear of the Lord, therefore, is of great help in the active purgation of the sense appetite and prepares the way for the passive purgation of the senses.

The following are the effects of the gift of fear so far as it relates to temperance:

1. **A vivid awareness of the sanctity and purity of God.** This is a logical consequence of the reverential fear of God, accompanied by the filial fear based on love. It culminates in the love of God for himself and the desire to give him glory in every way possible.
2. **A loss of interest in the pleasure afforded by creature attachments.** The soul is an adult in Christ and has put away the things of a child as well as childish attachment to those things that cater to the body. The soul has lost its taste for the delights of this world and can find satisfaction and joy only in the things related to God.
3. **A lofty degree of humility.** Recognizing as it does the exalted majesty of God, the soul cannot help prostrating itself before him with a deep sense of its nothingness. As Christ said to St. Catherine of Siena: "Catherine, you are she who is not; I am he who is"; or the concept of the All and the nothing (*Todo y nada*) so dear to St. John of the Cross.
4. **A profound appreciation for the beauty of the spiritual life of grace.** As temperance is a virtue that provides the proper proportion in human life so that the beauty of virtue may shine forth, so the gift that perfects temperance will logically manifest in an even higher degree the splendor of the life of grace. Hence the virtue of purity has been called the "angelic" virtue

because in its perfection it enables one to live as if one were no longer in the body but dwelt on the higher level of the spiritual and divine.

Although we cannot directly merit or cause the actuation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we can make use of certain **means to dispose ourselves for the Holy Spirit to work in us when he so wills.**

1. **Cultivate a love of solitude, recollection, and the faithful practice of mental prayer.** This is always necessary in the Christian life, but it is especially helpful in relation to the perfection of temperance and the actuation of the gift that perfects temperance. Simply growing in the love of God through mental prayer and frequently being alone with him can wean us from the attachment to sense satisfactions.

2. **Be vigilant in keeping custody of the senses and making acts of love of God.** If we keep a guard over the senses, sense objects cannot arouse desire within us. And if we turn to God frequently during the day with acts of love, our love will be nourished and grow strong, at the same time weakening the desire for anything less than God.

3. **Do all things for the salvation of souls and the glory of God.** The works of the apostolate are the crowning of perfect charity if done for the glory of God, for we thereby bring not only ourselves to God, but others as well. When done for such a lofty motive, the service to others out of love will help us rise above the life of the senses and go a long way in purging our love of any taint of selfishness.

Fortitude

The word fortitude can be understood in two principal senses. The first sense signifies in general a certain firmness of spirit and vigor of character, general conditions that must accompany all virtues if they are to be truly such. **In the second sense it designates a special supernatural virtue, infused with sanctifying grace to strengthen the irascible appetite** and the will so that they will not abandon the pursuit of the arduous or difficult good even when faced with grave danger to bodily health and life. This virtue has as its proper subject the irascible appetite because it is especially concerned with the control of fear and daring. However, it is necessary to mention the will because this faculty must intervene if fortitude is to be a true virtue, although the will itself is not the proper faculty in which fortitude resides. As regards the movements of fear and daring, fortitude will prevent unreasonable fear in the face of an evil that threatens, and will restrain the individual from unreasonably attacking an impending evil. Since the greatest natural evil is the loss of one's life, the virtue of fortitude is principally concerned with the fear of death.

The two acts, by which fortitude manifests itself in the external order are to attack and to endure. There will be occasions in which the individual is called upon to defend the good by means of attack, and there will be times in which the individual cannot attack but must resist by not yielding.

Of the two acts of fortitude, the principal and more difficult is to resist or to endure. **Contrary to common opinion, it is more painful and more heroic to resist an enemy or to suffer an evil**

than to attack. Psychologically it is easier to attack an evil, especially when the passion of anger has been aroused. But to suffer sickness or persecution or death with a tranquil and sturdy spirit requires the fortitude of a hero. For that reason the Greek drama portrayed the hero of the tragedy as a man who knew how to accept death courageously, and Christians have always considered the martyrs as the outstanding examples of Christian fortitude.

In its double activity of attacking and resisting evil, fortitude plays an important role in the spiritual life. There are countless obstacles and difficulties to be overcome along the road leading to perfection. To succeed in reaching the goal, we must resolutely begin a journey to perfection, we must not be surprised at the presence of the enemy, we must have courage to attack and conquer when prudence dictates, and we must have the constancy and perseverance to carry on without ever surrendering to the enemy. **And even if we have made great progress in the spiritual life and have achieved a moral victory over the enemy, fortitude will still be necessary in order to endure the trials and purgations sent by God to test and strengthen and purify the spirit.**

The virtue of fortitude has no subjective parts or species because it deals with a very particular matter that cannot be further subdivided. There are, however, integral and potential parts of fortitude. They refer to the same virtues materially but are differentiated by the fact that the integral parts of fortitude refer to the dangers of death, and the potential parts or annexed virtues refer to lesser dangers.[\(9\)](#)

Magnanimity

This virtue inclines one to perform some great act worthy of honor. It is therefore incompatible with mediocrity, and in this sense it is a most praiseworthy virtue.

The virtue of magnanimity **presupposes a noble and lofty soul.** It is often described as greatness of soul or nobility of character. Magnanimous persons are a superior type of person. They are never envious, they are not rivals of others, and they do not feel humiliated or embarrassed by the good of others. They are calm and leisurely in their actions; they do not give themselves to many activities, but only to those of greater importance.

They are truthful, sincere, somewhat reserved in speech, and a loyal friend. They never lie, but they speak their mind without being concerned about the opinion of others. They are open and frank, and never imprudent or hypocritical. They are objective in their friendships, and yet do not close their eyes to the defects of their friends. They are never excessive in their admiration of other people, nor attached to anything. They look primarily to virtue and to that which is noble.

The petty affections or disagreements that cause so many difficulties in social life mean nothing to them. If they are injured by others, they quickly forget and forgive. They are not overjoyed at the praise and applause of others, nor are they saddened at the criticism they may receive from others. They do not complain about the things they lack, but they learn to do without. This virtue presupposes a high degree of perfection in the other virtues.

Patience

The virtue of patience enables one to bear physical and moral sufferings without sadness of spirit or dejection of heart. It is one of the most necessary virtues in the Christian life because the trials and sufferings we must inevitably suffer in this life require the assistance of some virtue to keep us strong and firm lest we yield to discouragement and sorrow. **Many souls lose the merit of their trials and sufferings because they fail to exercise the virtue of patience.** Indeed, they suffer even more than they would have because of their lack of conformity to the will of God.

The principal motives for the practice of Christian patience are the following:

1. **Conformity with the loving will of God**, who knows better than we the things that are good for us and therefore sometimes sends us suffering and tribulation.
2. **The recollection of the suffering of Jesus and Mary**, incomparable models of patience, and the sincere desire to imitate them.
3. **The necessity of making reparation for our sins** by the voluntary and virtuous acceptance of suffering in atonement for our sins.
4. **The necessity of cooperating with Christ in the application of the fruits of redemption, bearing our sufferings in union with his in order to make up what is wanting to his passion** (cf. Col. 1:24).
5. **The prospect of an eternity of happiness** that awaits us if we know how to suffer in patience. The suffering passes, but the fruit of having sanctified our suffering will never pass.

As with the virtue of humility, so also with patience do we distinguish various grades or degrees that give some indication of the perfection of the virtue in individual Christians.

There are five fundamental degrees of patience:

1. **Resignation without complaint or impatience to the crosses God sends us** or permits to come to us.
2. **Peace and serenity in the face of affliction**, without any of the sadness or melancholy that sometimes accompany mere resignation.
3. **Acceptance of one's cross for the love of God.**
4. **Complete and total joy**, which leads one to give thanks to God for being associated with him in the mystery of the Cross.
5. **The folly of the Cross**, which prefers suffering to pleasure and places all one's delight in external or internal suffering by which one is configured with Christ.

Perseverance

The virtue of perseverance inclines one to persist in the practice of the good in spite of the difficulties involved. To remain unmoved and resolute in the practice of virtue from day to day requires a fortitude of spirit that is provided by this virtue. All the virtues need the help of perseverance, because without it no virtue could be preserved and practiced over a long period of time, nor would any virtue ultimately attain its perfection. Although every virtue is by definition a habit difficult to remove and is, therefore, of itself a stable quality, the special difficulty arising from a lifelong fidelity in the practice of any given virtue requires the special virtue of perseverance. Thus we see how one virtue comes to the aid of another.

However, the virtue of perseverance, even when perfected, requires a special assistance of grace called the grace of perseverance.⁽¹⁰⁾ St. Thomas briefly summarizes the difference between this virtue and the grace required for its exercise:

Perseverance has a double meaning. First, it denotes the habit of perseverance, which is a virtue. And as a virtue, it requires the gift of habitual grace as do the other infused virtues. Secondly, it may be understood as signifying the act of perseverance that endures until death, and in this sense it requires not only habitual grace but also the gratuitous help of God, which sustains man in good until the end of life.⁽¹¹⁾

The reason for the necessity of a special grace from God to insure our final perseverance is that sanctifying or habitual grace does not change our free will, in the sense that grace alone is a guarantee that the just person will never sin. However just and however perfect we may be, we are always able to sin, and for that reason we need, over and above the infused virtue of perseverance, the special grace of final perseverance that the Council of Trent calls "**that great gift.**"

Constancy

Constancy is closely related to the virtue of perseverance but is distinguished from the latter by reason of a special difficulty to be overcome. The essential note of perseverance is that it gives firmness and strength of soul in the face of the difficulty connected with the prolongation of a virtuous life. Constancy strengthens the soul against the difficulties that proceed from any other external obstacle, such as the influence of bad example or special temptations from without.

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 that 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.

2. **To foresee the difficulties 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 one's fear, and when difficulties actually arise, one will overcome them much more easily because one has anticipated them.

3. **To accept with a generous spirit the annoyances of daily life.** Every vocation in life is accompanied by its own particular crosses and difficulties, even if they be merely the monotony and boredom 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 that 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. 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. It is likewise helpful to remember the profound suffering of Mary, of whom it is said: "Come, all you who pass by the way, look and see whether there is any suffering like my suffering" (Lam. 1:12).

5. **To intensify our love of God.** Love is as strong as death (Song 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. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who 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. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

The Gift of Fortitude

The gift of fortitude is a supernatural habit through which the Holy Spirit strengthens the soul for the practice of virtue, with invincible confidence of overcoming any dangers or difficulties that may arise. In the operation of this gift, as of the other gifts, the soul acts by a kind of instinctive interior impulse that proceeds directly from the Holy Spirit. And although the virtue of fortitude has the same name as the gift by which it is perfected, the gift extends to all the heroic actions of the other virtues as well. One of the clearest marks of distinction between the virtue of fortitude and the gift of fortitude is the confidence one experiences in being able to overcome great dangers and difficulties. **It is true that the virtue of fortitude gives strength to the soul for overcoming obstacles, but the gift imparts the confidence of success.**

The gift of fortitude is absolutely necessary for the perfection of the infused virtues, and sometimes it is required for perseverance in the state of grace. As to the perfection of the other virtues by the gift of fortitude, we should recall that **a virtue is called perfect when its act springs from the soul with energy, promptness, and perseverance.** The continued perfection in any virtue is manifestly supernatural, and it can be explained only by the supernatural mode of

operation of the gift of fortitude. Thus the perfection of any of the virtues will at some time or other require the operation of the gift of fortitude.

As regards the necessity of the gift of fortitude, for perseverance in the state of grace, there are occasions in the lives of most Christians when they are confronted, suddenly and inexorably, with the decision either to practice virtue in a given instance or to commit a mortal sin. If the virtue of fortitude is not sufficiently perfect, it will be necessary that the gift of fortitude come into play so that the individual will have the supernatural strength to perform the act of virtue. Moreover, by the very fact that some temptations are sudden and unexpected, while the operation of the virtues of prudence and fortitude is usually slow and discursive, one will need the prompt intervention of the gifts of counsel and fortitude. It is precisely on this point that St. Thomas bases his teaching on ***the necessity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for eternal salvation.***

1. ***It gives the soul relentless vigor in the practice of virtue.*** This is an inevitable result of the supernatural mode by which the virtue of fortitude operates when under the influence, of, the gift of fortitude. At such times the soul does not feel any weakness or lack of confidence in the practice of virtue. It may suffer from the obstacles and dangers it encounters, but it, proceeds against them with supernatural energy in spite of all difficulties.

2. ***It overcomes all lukewarmness in the service of God.*** This is a natural consequence of the superhuman energy imparted to the soul by the gift of fortitude. ***Lukewarmness retards many persons on the way to perfection.*** It is due almost always to a lack of vigor and fortitude in the practice of virtue. Lukewarm souls consider that it is too much of an effort to have to conquer themselves in so many things and to maintain their spirit from one day to another in the monotonous fulfillment of the details of their daily obligations. The majority of such souls give in to weariness and renounce the battle, with the result that henceforth they live a purely mechanical life of routine, if indeed they do not turn their back completely on the life of virtue and abandon the pursuit of perfection. Only the gift of fortitude, which strengthens the power of the soul in a supernatural way, is an efficacious remedy against lukewarmness in the service of God.

3. ***It makes the soul intrepid and valiant in every type of danger or against every kind of enemy.*** This is another of the great effects of the gift of fortitude and is particularly marked in the lives of the saints. The apostles themselves, gentle and meek by nature, and even cowards when abandoned by their Master on the eve of Good Friday, presented themselves once more to the world on Pentecost Sunday with a superhuman fortitude and courage. They were then afraid of no one, for they realized that it was necessary to obey God rather than man (cf. Acts 5:29). They confessed the teachings of Christ and sealed their apostolate with their blood. All of this was the supernatural effect of the gift of fortitude, which the apostles received in all its plenitude on the first feast of Pentecost. In addition to the examples of the apostles, we have countless examples of saints who have been raised up by God throughout the centuries to give testimony to his doctrine of love, to combat the enemies of his Church, and in many instances to lay down their lives for Christ. From the earliest days of the Church and the ages of persecution to our own century, there have been men and women and even children who have manifested in their lives the power and the valor that are imparted to holy souls by the gift of fortitude.

4. **It enables souls to suffer with patience and joy.** Although resignation is a praiseworthy virtue, it is nevertheless imperfect, and the saints do not manifest it in their lives once they have reached the perfection of virtue. We mean by this that, in a strict sense, the saints did not resign themselves to suffering; rather, they sought it voluntarily. Sometimes this "folly of the Cross" was manifested in extraordinary and terrifying acts of penance. At other times it found expression in the heroic patience with which holy souls endured the greatest conceivable sickness and pain, their faces radiant with joy, as in the case of **St. Therese of Lisieux, who said that she had reached a point in which she could no longer suffer because all suffering had become sweet to her.** This is the language of heroism that proceeds directly from the intense operation in the soul of the gift of fortitude.

5. **It gives the soul the quality of heroism in great things and in small things.** No greater fortitude is required to suffer the martyr's death at one stroke than to endure without failing the prolonged martyrdom of the heroic practice of virtue and the fulfillment of one's daily duties to the smallest detail. This principle is valid for every state of life, and it is a point that should be preached more frequently to the faithful. Given the weakness and instability of human nature, **it is evident that for most people the most difficult test of fortitude consists in faithful perseverance in the performance of even the smallest duties of one's state in life.**

In addition to the general means for the increase and strengthening of the gifts (prayer, recollection, fidelity to grace), **the following are more immediately concerned with strengthening the gift of fortitude:**

1. **To accustom ourselves to the exact fulfillment of our duties in spite of any repugnance.** There are some heroic acts that surpass our powers at any given moment, but there can be no doubt that, with the assistance of the ordinary grace that God denies to no one, we can all do much more than we actually do. We shall never arrive at the heroism of the saints until the gift of fortitude operates intensely in us, but this operation is not likely to be effected in us by the Holy Spirit as a reward for our spiritual sloth and voluntary lukewarmness. To those who do the best that they can, the assistance of God will never be lacking. On the other hand, we cannot complain at not receiving the help of God through the operation of the gift of fortitude if we have not done all that we can. **We must pray as if it all depended upon God, but we must strive as if it all depended upon ourselves.**

2. **Not to ask God to remove our cross but only that he give us the strength to carry it.** The gift of fortitude is given to holy souls so that they will be able to bear the great crosses and tribulations through which they must inevitably pass in order to arrive at the height of sanctity. If, on experiencing any kind of suffering, or on feeling the weight of a cross God sends to us, we begin to complain and to ask God to take it from us, why should we then be surprised if the gifts of the Holy Spirit and especially the gift of fortitude do not operate in us? If, on being tested in little things, God finds that we are weak, how can his purifying action proceed in us? We should never complain about crosses, but we should ask the Lord that he give us the strength to bear them. Then we should remain tranquil and remember that **God will never be outdone in generosity.**

3. ***To practice voluntary mortification faithfully.*** The person who freely embraces suffering no longer fears it and may eventually embrace it with spiritual joy as a means of proving one's love. This does not mean that one should imitate the saints who performed heroic penitential acts, for not all souls, and not even all the saints, were called to this degree of mortification. ***Normally there are numerous opportunities in daily life and in the fulfillment of one's duties of state in life for the practice of self-denial.*** Indeed, it is a paradox to attempt to perform extremely difficult acts of mortification and penance and then fail to bear the little crosses of daily life. The goal of mortification is to strengthen oneself in the face of temptation and thereby allow virtue to develop; the purpose of self-denial is to control one's natural inclination to excessive self-love, which greedily seeks its own satisfaction, and to cultivate generous gift -- love. And although difficult at the beginning, the practices of mortification can eventually become second nature, and at that point one acquires the stability and fidelity that are characteristic of fortitude.

CHAPTER NOTES

1. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, qq. 47-9.
 2. *Ibid.*, q. 58.
 3. *Ibid.*, q. 84.
 4. For detailed information, see *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 102.
 5. *Ibid.*, q. 186, aa. 7-8.
 6. The letter was written at Rome on March 16, 1553, and can be seen in its entirety in *Obras de San Ignacio de Loyola* (Madrid: B.A.C., 1952), pp. 833-43.
 7. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 107, a. 2.
 8. *Ibid.*, q. 168, aa. 2-4.
 9. *Ibid.*, q. 128.
 10. This doctrine was affirmed by the Council of Trent. See Denz.-Schön. 1572.
 11. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 137, a. 4.
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