

Love and Fortitude

What is a virtue? The website Catholic Answers defines virtues as “special graces given by God to the soul for the accomplishment of particular objectives” (“What’s the Catholic Understanding of Virtue”). These “special graces” must be practiced by everyone, but especially elected leaders. Leaders must not only possess virtue but continuously exercise it. Without virtue, leaders’ moral compasses will run haywire, and they will likely make corrupt decisions. The two most critical virtues for leaders are fortitude and love; these virtues must be exercised in thought, word, and deed.

At Confirmation a person receives fortitude. Just as fortitude is necessary for Catholic Confirmands, it is also essential for elected leaders. Many people think of fortitude as merely a synonym for courage. Despite courage being a similar word, it lacks a vital aspect that fortitude contains. Fortitude enables people to implement other virtues, in a sustained manner, during trying circumstances. When a person is tempted to make an immoral choice in discouraging situations, fortitude empowers him or her to act with integrity. Fortitude, when combined with love, allows other virtues to thrive.

The best method to practice fortitude is by using it to accomplish God’s will. A primary example is the third Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary, the Crowning of Jesus with Thorns. Its fruit is moral courage. The combination of “moral” and courage”, amid arduous circumstances, is the most precise definition of fortitude. Jesus Christ was mocked, scourged, and whipped on the way to His crucifixion. He could have chosen not to endure that suffering. However, it was God’s will to sacrifice Jesus for our sins. The fuel that kept Jesus going on that tumultuous path was that “special grace” of fortitude.

If elected leaders execute their duties with fortitude, they will tackle objectives despite potential risks. They will exemplify fortitude in their choices by always persisting in “doing the

right thing”, regardless of popular opinion and political pressure. If the leader is Christian, this will also consist of doing God’s will without fear.

The second, but yet the most imperative, virtue that leaders must practice is love. Jesus, the most perfect leader, ordered the application of this virtue in the greatest commandments. The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus declaring, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself,”(Mt. 22:37-39).

God is love, and without His love, nothing would flourish. St. Paul the Evangelist emphasized the importance of love in his writings. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-2, he proclaims, “If I speak with the tongues of mankind and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

Scripture thus declares that if someone is lacking love, all that he or she does will result in emptiness. Without love, leaders will not achieve anything of value. It can easily be determined if leaders have this virtue. They will bear fruit by relying on God’s supreme love, which flows from His Grace. It is impossible to practice virtue without receiving God’s infinite love.

To apply the virtue of love, leaders must be willing to lay down their lives for those they serve. Our Lord led this example. Jesus died so that humans may live for eternity. God’s love for humanity was perfected in His perfect sacrifice. Just as military members and parents are willing to lay down their lives for their country or their children, so must leaders. Leaders must be willing to aid people despite any threatening costs. Elected leaders must be willing to encounter difficult decisions regarding abortion, euthanasia, and war and peace. These issues must be

addressed with love and fortitude; leaders must not succumb to ad hominem insults or even threats of physical attacks.

In sum, if leaders do not possess love, they will not have any virtue, including fortitude. Without fortitude, they will not withstand the hardship that threatens the existence of other virtues. Leaders' produced fruit will determine their steadfastness in practicing these virtues. To serve virtuously, elected leaders must exercise love and fortitude, and they will obey our Lord's greatest commandment by doing so.

Works Cited

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