

24. November 2023

## The virtue of fortitude Part I

The readings of the last few days presented us with impressive examples of faith, faithfulness and fortitude. I have therefore decided to dedicate some meditations to the cardinal virtue of fortitude. In these times of turmoil, it is particularly important to aspire to and practice this virtue, in order to be able to resist the various temptations that are presented to us. Let us take as our model those people we met in the readings of the last days, who showed us that obedience and faithfulness to God are above all earthly values and that, with God's help, it is even possible to overcome fear.

Fortitude does not mean the absence of fear. It is not the ideal of courage conveyed to us in the stories of heroes who fear nothing and no one. Even a fearful person can, through grace, become strong and courageous, because it is God who makes them capable of it. But he, for his part, will have to exercise himself in this virtue and acquire it. It is not that we can simply avoid being overcome by this fear that appears without our seeking it, but what we can do are concrete acts, so that it does not paralyse us, preventing us from doing what has been entrusted to us.

Such acts we really must do, because in this way we will train ourselves in the virtue of fortitude. Nor should we "negotiate" with fear; rather, with God's grace, we must overcome it, even with our hearts pounding and our hands bathed in sweat.

That is why we must not always evade difficulties and run away from them either. The virtue of prudence will teach us when it is better to face the battle and when it is better to face the situation in a different way. But it must not be fear that decides it! This is where fortitude comes to our aid, which becomes a basic attitude in our life, encouraging us to overcome in the Lord whatever comes our way and to do what pleases God, even if it involves effort and fatigue.

The truly courageous person does not suffer for the sake of suffering, nor to achieve selfish goals, nor to obtain ephemeral goods; rather, his motivation is higher. This must be borne in mind in order to understand the virtue of fortitude and not to confuse it with mere audacity. Because of a higher motivation, the courageous person is willing to

accept the suffering and setbacks that may come his way, while remaining steadfast. In the examples of the last days, this motivation was the highest: obedience to the Will of God.

Today, in a world increasingly hostile to faith, we need to be strong and courageous, as this extract from a lecture by Dr Joseph Schuhmacher on "The cardinal virtues and their importance in the Christian life" suggests:

"The Gospel - the message of the Church - necessarily stands in opposition to the messages of this world. Jesus declares: 'I am sending you out like sheep among wolves' (Mt 10:16). He Himself is handed over to death by the rulers of this world. The opposition between the Gospel and the world is so much in its nature that we should question whether the world as a whole approves of this message. If the Church tells the world what the world already knows and thinks anyway, then it will do well and be safe. But how can it then stand before God? The virtue of fortitude has become rare in the Church because of the weakening of faith. In view of the world's resistance to the good, to the Gospel and to the message of the Church, confrontation is an essential element in the life of the Christian. In this confrontation, she needs the virtue of fortitude. To adapt oneself to the world is to betray the cause of God. One cannot serve God and money (cf. Lk 16:13). Paul exhorts the faithful of the community of Rome with these words, which are also addressed to us: 'Do not model your behaviour on the contemporary world' (Rom 12:2). We must fight evil in and around us, so that we may become what God wants us to be. Whoever puts everything on the line will win everything".

This theme is ever topical and we will return to it tomorrow. For today, let us stay with the following: it takes strength to remain faithful to the Gospel day after day and to face the battles that are ours to fight. The more we practise the virtue of fortitude, the more the Lord will be able to form us, so that we will not only eat from His table, but also carry the cross that is in our path.