

25. November 2023

The virtue of fortitude Part II

Fortitude - which is considered as one of the four cardinal virtues - is part of the basic equipment of a soldier. If he does not become courageous, he cannot be counted on in the toughest battles, for fear would take hold of him, so that the situation would become dangerous for all his comrades.

It is easy to make this observation when we think of physical warfare. But physical warfare is a reflection of the spiritual combat in which we find ourselves. In chapter 6 of the letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes us understand that our struggle is against "the principalities, the powers, the rulers of this dark world and the spirits of evil that are in the air" (v. 12).

The war in which we find ourselves must be fought on many levels, and the Lord does not exempt us from doing our part. Each in his own way, and according to the circumstances in which he finds himself, needs the virtue of fortitude and must learn to overcome all cowardice and to restrain his fearfulness, so that it does not prevent him from doing what the Lord wants of him.

In yesterday's meditation, I mentioned that even fearful souls can become courageous. In fact, with our will we can exercise it, to appropriate it and so that, with the passage of time, it becomes part of us. Sometimes we say: "He is a brave man" or "she is a strong woman", to imply that she is capable of suffering and enduring much. This indicates that the virtue of fortitude is not only to attack; it is also to endure.

Let us listen again to Dr. Joseph Schumacher, from whose lecture we also quoted a passage yesterday:

"The virtue of fortitude involves two moments: on the one hand, attack; on the other hand, endurance. The courageous person attacks the enemies of God, the enemies of a just cause, in order to achieve the triumph of the good, of the Kingdom of God... Christian fortitude makes use above all of the weapons of the Spirit, and is demonstrated especially in the courageous profession of the faith. In many cases, when the courageous

person is surrounded by injustice, oppression and external violence, he has no choice but to persevere in patience and stand firm. Since the natural man is more averse to the latter attitude than to attack, St. Thomas Aquinas (+1274) speaks of resistance as the most excellent act of fortitude. Resistance, then, is the most significant act of virtue of a brave soldier of the Kingdom of God. In this act, he specifically resembles the suffering and crucified Christ. In this situation, he finds comfort in the words of Jesus: 'Your perseverance will win you your lives' (Lk 21:19)."

Topics related to spiritual combat I often deal with in a special way in the Balta-Lelija group (which means: "white lily"). The members of this group are people who have understood that we are currently in a great spiritual struggle and who consciously want to take their place in the "army of the Lamb". Some may feel at the mercy of the events around them and the powers at work in them, and may wonder what they, in all their weakness, can do to counteract it and whether they are brave enough to fight. The text we heard a moment ago gives us the answer. In spiritual combat, endurance is very important: to know how to endure, to reject the darts of the evil one, to persevere in patience and to pray insistently. Often it is the women who prove to be strong here. By the way, the patron saint of Balta-Lelija is a very brave young woman: Saint Joan of Arc.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite those who are interested in joining the spiritual resistance movement "Balta-Lelija" to write to us at the following e-mail address: balta-lelija@jemael.net.

But I would also like to encourage everyone to strive to acquire the virtue of fortitude, in order to walk more firmly on the path of following the Lord.

Let us listen to one more excerpt from Dr. Joseph Schuhmacher's lecture on "The Cardinal Virtues and their importance in the Christian life":

"As St. Thomas Aquinas explains, fortitude implies patience, for that which is proper to the patient person - namely, not to be confounded by the misfortune that threatens him - is also possessed by the courageous person. In the latter, however, something more is added; namely, that, if necessary, he will meet and attack the threatening evil. St. Thomas Aquinas observes that the endurance that is part of fortitude consists in persevering with all our strength in doing good, in not giving in to the physical sufferings that come our way... The essence of fortitude is not attack, not self-

confidence, not anger, but this perseverance and patience. This does not mean that patience and perseverance are in themselves superior to attack; but that, in our concrete world, these are the only possibilities of endurance, and in them can be revealed the deepest strength of man's soul. We are patient when we do not allow the wounds that are inflicted on us in doing good to rob us of serenity, joy and clarity of soul. Patience is the archetype of invulnerability or, as St. Hildegard of Bingen says, it is 'the pillar that nothing can break down'".

Far braver than the heroes of wars are the patient; and stronger than those who conquer cities are those who master themselves (cf. Prov 16:32).

Having looked at courage in the Old Testament witnesses and having spoken a little about the essence of the virtue of fortitude, we will take up the theme again on Monday (after the Feast of Christ the King), to apply it to the interior life.