



1. March 2024

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 17: "The virtue of fortitude and prudence"

In dealing with the so-called "cardinal virtues", one would normally begin with the virtue of prudence. However, since in the previous days we had discussed the ascetic struggle against the passions, it is appropriate that we first deal with the virtue of fortitude.

The virtue of fortitude

Indeed, we need this virtue in order not to give up in the struggle and to be able to endure all adversities, and sometimes even defeats. This is an important aspect of fortitude: it is the ability to endure something for the sake of a greater good and to be willing to endure suffering for it.

It should be clear that we do not aspire to the virtue of fortitude simply to be brave just for the sake of it. Rather, it is a higher good that is at stake. In the case of the struggle against vices or against evil in general, we have the good in view and we want to achieve it.

By regaining control over our passions, we can, for example, put our members at the service of God (Rom 6:13). If we restrain our greed, we discover God's wealth more deeply and it becomes easier for us to share; if we restrain our sexual desire according to God's will, His grace can unfold more in us and we do not become a cause of scandal to anyone, etc...

The virtue of fortitude is related to courage, and it is elevated and perfected by the gift of the Holy Spirit: the gift of fortitude.

Not only do we need courage and fortitude to defend ourselves against enemies from within and without, but above all we need it to walk our spiritual path completely, without stopping at a certain point and fleeing from the necessary purifications.

St. Teresa of Avila says that one of the first conditions for reaching perfection would be fortitude. In her autobiography she writes: "I affirm that an imperfect person requires more fortitude to walk the path of perfection than to suddenly become a martyr".

So, we need this virtue to continue on the path we have taken after the Lord. In these apocalyptic times, fortitude is indispensable to remain firm and faithful to the faith and to the authentic doctrine of the Church. In a time of increasing moral decadence, of confusion - even within the Church - and of escalating persecution of the faithful, we must persevere and trust in the Lord.

Fortitude does not mean intentionally exposing oneself to unnecessary dangers and being fearless. Rather, it means being willing to accept disadvantages and sufferings for the Lord's sake, and to persevere with His grace.

The virtue of prudence

Since I have spoken many times about this virtue, I will content myself today, in the context of our Lenten journey, with a brief synthesis, and in the following link you can find a more extensive description of prudence:

<http://en.elijamission.net/2022/10/11/>

The virtue of prudence is not to be confused with that cleverness and shrewdness which seeks its own advantage. Rather, prudence - and in particular Christian prudence - looks at things and circumstances from the perspective of God and eternity:

"What is most pleasing to the Lord? How can I draw closer to Him? How can I make the best possible use of the time I have been given to work for the Kingdom of God?" Many similar questions will be asked by prudence, paying special attention to the passages of Scripture which, with their advice, give it an answer. Since his eyes are fixed on the Lord, the spirit of counsel will instruct him and show him what is appropriate or best in the given situation.

In connection with what we have said about fortitude, prudence would certainly avoid foolish challenges that would serve no other purpose than to test one's courage. Sometimes being prudente means dodge dangers, not out of fear or self-protection; but because one realises that it does not make much sense to expose oneself to such and such a situation. Even Jesus sometimes hid Himself from threats (cf. e.g. Jn 8:59).

The parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-12) shows us clearly how necessary the virtue of prudence is. Only five of them, who were wise, were admitted to the wedding feast;

while the other five, who were foolish, were left out because they did not have the foresight to bring enough oil for their lamps. The Lord concludes the parable with this warning: "*So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour*" (Mt 25:13).

Prudence and vigilance form a very fruitful union. Prudence advises us to "*seize the present time*", according to St. Paul's exhortation (Eph 5:16). This means not to miss opportunities to do good, to practise the virtues, to glorify God, to cooperate in the salvation of souls. In fact, if we miss an opportunity to do a good deed, we will have lost it forever. Certainly other occasions will present themselves to us in the future; but the one we missed will never return. Here again, spiritual vigilance would come into play, warning us not to miss any moment to do good.

Both the virtues of fortitude and prudence are very necessary on our path, and we should ask the Lord for them in a special way and also put them into practice. God will give us the occasions to do so. It will be inevitable that we will make mistakes. But from these mistakes we can learn, and so prudence will help us again to be better prepared the next time.

If in certain situations we were not courageous and we regret in our hearts that we were not courageous, then this failure can become a source for us to regain courage and better face the next situation in which we find ourselves.

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <http://en.elijamission.net/2022/03/18/>