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## The Spiritual Life (Part III)

To advance in the spiritual life it is essential to obey the Holy Spirit. He is our inner guide and teacher. When we become familiar with Him and learn to listen and follow His voice better, our spiritual path can become lighter and more agile.

After the Holy Spirit has led us to the first conversion (I am referring to that crucial moment when we make a clear decision to follow Jesus and put nothing before Him, as opposed to an indecisive and indifferent attitude towards God), He will continue to carry out His work within us.

Just as the decision we make at our first conversion is the authentic response to God's love, so are all the subsequent steps on the path of sanctification.

God's love has been poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5) and He wants to exercise His gentle dominion in them. In our first conversion we gave our fundamental "yes" to this work of God in us, and now the Holy Spirit wants to carry it forward. In this sense, the efficacy of His work will depend on our collaboration, inasmuch as we must take the necessary steps along this path. The Holy Spirit does not exert coercion or pressure on us, because to do this would be alien to the essence of love. On the contrary, He attracts us, He courts us, He reminds us and warns us; at times He also intervenes, preventing us from taking the wrong path, but He never forces us, for this would restrict our freedom.

So, we see here a first criterion for identifying the action of the Spirit of God. I insist that this does not mean that He could not or should not admonish us forcefully, because, in fact, we have already given our "yes" to God and we do not want to stop, much less go back on the road of unification with Him.

Let us consider the Holy Spirit as our divine friend and teacher, who wants nothing more than to awaken love in us more and more and to make us what we are by vocation: the beloved children of God, who willingly fulfill His Will and want to fully adhere our own will to His.

At this point, we have mentioned the goal of our spiritual journey, which consists precisely in the unification of our will with the Will of God. Every authentic spiritual path will have this same goal: the union of wills with God. The prayer that we say every day in the Our Father-"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"-applies to our own life as well. Just as God's will is fulfilled in heaven, so we also desire for it to be fulfilled in us.

For this path we have a guide and teacher, who is simultaneously our divine friend, and we also know clearly what the goal is. Many other companions will be at our side, especially the Virgin Mary and the angels and saints who await us in the beyond. But we hope that we can also count on wise counsel from spiritual people here on earth.

If we remain within the framework of the authentic doctrine and morals of the Church, without allowing ourselves to be influenced by the errors of modernism, we will move on "safe ground". The holy sacraments will do the rest to help us again and again in our weakness, feeding us with heavenly manna in our pilgrimage through the "earthly desert". Let us therefore take heart and entrust ourselves entirely to God's guidance, as Mary did. Thus we will reach our goal, sustained by God's grace.

### The Virtues

We know the so-called "theological virtues" and the human or moral virtues, which are acquired through human efforts. While God places all His power in the theological virtues without our collaboration, the moral virtues were instilled in us on the day of baptism as a seed, but He left the work of developing them on the basis of habits and will to us, always moved by the grace of God of course. Of these moral virtues, four stand out in a special way, which is why they are called "cardinal virtues": prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice.

Although prudence has primacy among the four, I would like today - in context with the path of following the Lord - to focus on the cardinal virtue of fortitude. This is not to be confused with the gift of fortitude, even though they have the same name.

This virtue, which unfolds through the efforts of our will, will play a fundamental role in the spiritual journey. It will teach us not to give up in the face of the least resistance

we encounter in following Christ and to endure adversity. It easily happens that fear invades us or that others provoke it in us, giving us the impression that the path we have just embarked on is too steep, too difficult. We will also be confronted with our own weaknesses and may allow ourselves to be intimidated by them.

Added to this is the fact that our environment is often alien or even hostile to the Christian faith. We may encounter people who ridicule our faith or present it as an exaggeration. Nor can we rule out the possibility of suffering certain persecutions or being marginalized because of our faith...

But probably the hardest thing will be when we feel that we have failed, when we lose heart and confidence fades. Then we will be in danger of throwing in the towel or weakening the demands of the spiritual path, opting for one that involves less resistance.

We must be aware that the 3 enemies of our soul - namely, our fallen human nature, the world and especially the devil - will do everything possible to dissuade us from embarking on a path of more intense pursuit. The devil, for his part, fears losing his influence over the soul, and also worries that the soul might become an apostle who will conquer other souls for the Kingdom of God, wresting them from his clutches.

Our fallen nature fears the real or imaginary efforts that the path of following could cost us, and shuns asceticism and any restraint in its desire for pleasure.

Finally, the world in its vanity does not want to let go of us and praises itself as something palatable.

Nevertheless, the virtue of fortitude, sustained by the grace of God, remains firm on the path undertaken, come what may. This does not mean that we no longer feel fear. Even a person who is naturally fearful can become courageous and strong, overcoming fear and doing the right thing in spite of their fear.

The seed of fortitude that God instilled in us should become a solid virtue as we exercise it. Just as one becomes humble through concrete acts of humility, so too one becomes strong and courageous through acts of fortitude.

To conclude this meditation, let us listen to a nice phrase from the Carmelite school, which St. Therese of the Child Jesus addressed to one of her novices: "It doesn't matter that you have no courage, if only you act as if you have it".