Lesson 29 – The Cardinal Virtue of Fortitude

What is a virtue?
What is the virtue of Fortitude?
What are the two ways we can express Fortitude?
What is magnanimity and how does it differ from pusillanimity?
What emotion does magnanimity perfect?
What are three virtues of the magnanimous man?
What are three defects against magnanimity?

I. THE HUMAN VIRTUES

1804 Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good.

The moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love.

The cardinal virtues

1805 Four virtues play a pivotal role and accordingly are called "cardinal"; all the others are grouped around them. They are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. "If anyone loves righteousness, [Wisdom's] labors are virtues; for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice, and courage."64 These virtues are praised under other names in many passages of Scripture.

1808 Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause. "The Lord is my strength and my song." "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."71

The virtues and grace

1810 Human virtues acquired by education, by deliberate acts and by a perseverance ever-renewed in repeated efforts are purified and elevated by divine grace. With God's help, they forge character and give facility in the practice of the good. The virtuous man is happy to practice them.

1811 It is not easy for man, wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance. Christ's gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues. Everyone should always ask for this grace of light and strength, frequent the sacraments, cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and follow his calls to love what is good and shun evil.
Fortitude

Cardinal Virtue

The virtue of fortitude, or courage, is firmness of spirit, steadiness of will in doing good despite obstacles in the performance of our daily duty. It suppresses inordinate fear and curbs recklessness. Because fortitude also moderates rashness, it is the special virtue of pioneers in any field.

Fortitude is the obverse of temperance. Where temperance limits inordinate desire for major pleasures such as food and drink or the marital act, fortitude limits inordinate rashness and fear in the face of major pain that threatens to unbalance human nature.

Gift of the Spirit

The gift of fortitude brings to those who have it a dauntless spirit of resolution, firmness of mind, and indomitable will to persevere with a quiet faith in God’s providence that overcomes all obstacles. It also brings courage to persist in the practice of virtue despite trials, illness, persecution or external failure. A Catholic who becomes fervent in God’s service will soon be condemned by the world, but the gift of fortitude will sustain him as he walks toward the Cross.

Fortitude is commonly called courage, but it is different from what much of what we think of as courage today. Fortitude is always reasoned and reasonable; the person exercising fortitude is willing to put himself in danger if necessary, but he does not seek danger for danger's sake.

The Third of the Cardinal Virtues:

St. Thomas Aquinas ranked fortitude as the third of the cardinal virtues, because it serves prudence and justice, the higher virtues. Fortitude is the virtue that allows us to overcome fear and to remain steady in our will in the face of obstacles. Prudence and justice are the virtues through which we decide what needs to be done; fortitude gives us the strength to do it.

What Fortitude Is Not:

Fortitude is not foolhardiness or rashness, "rushing in where angels fear to tread." Indeed, part of the virtue of fortitude, as Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J., notes in his Modern Catholic Dictionary, is the "curbing of recklessness." Putting our bodies or lives in danger when it is not necessary is not fortitude but foolishness.

A Gift of the Holy Spirit:

Sometimes, however, the ultimate sacrifice is necessary, in order to stand up for what is right and to save our souls. Fortitude is the virtue of the martyrs, who are willing to give their lives rather than to renounce their faith. That sacrifice may be passive—Christian martyrs do not actively seek martyrdom—but it is nonetheless determined and resolute.

It is in martyrdom that we see the best example of fortitude rising above a mere cardinal virtue (able to be practiced by anyone) into a supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit. But it also shows itself, as the Catholic Encyclopedia notes, "in moral courage against the evil spirit of the times, against improper fashions,
against human respect, against the common tendency to seek at least the comfortable, if not the voluptuous."

Fortitude, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, also allows us to cope with poverty and loss, and to cultivate the Christian virtues that allow us to rise above the basic requirements of Christianity. The saints, in their love for God and their fellow man and their determination to do what is right, exhibit fortitude as a supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit, and not merely as a cardinal virtue.

**Fortitude**

Or: The Determination to Become Happy

In our lives many situations arise in which it becomes difficult to do the right thing, even when we know what it is. There may be all sorts of reasons for why it is disagreeable to act according to what we know is best. In order to stay strong, to do what is good, we need the third cardinal virtue, known alternately as fortitude, courage, or bravery. This is the virtue by which we do the right thing, even in the midst of hardship.

Fortitude helps us to overcome any dangers, obstacles, and fears; it enables a person to withstand whatever difficulties may block him from attaining his true goal. Classically, fortitude was that virtue which made a man willing to fight and even potentially die in battle. It was seen as the virtue of the soldier, who was determined to offer his life for the sake of a greater good. Now, we Catholics believe that we too are soldiers, that we too are engaged in battle, although the battle is not a physical one, but rather spiritual. We too, must be willing to offer our lives for the greatest good, namely, the glory of God. In early Christian times, and even in parts of the world today, this possibility of being killed for the sake of the faith was and is very present, and so the Church has been provided with the most shining examples of fortitude, namely, the martyrs.

This is the call of every Catholic: to possess fortitude to the extent that we willingly offer up our lives for God and the Church. Although we probably won't be literally killed for our faith, still we must be prepared to make all kinds of great sacrifices in living out our Catholic identity.

**Fortitude lies between Extremes**

All the cardinal virtues exist as forms of balance, and so must be carefully distinguished from the various excesses which threaten to substitute for virtue. This is especially true in the case of fortitude, with can easily degenerate into one of the following extremes:

Firstly, Brashness. Brashness is the vice of lacking a proper awareness of or concern for real danger. A brash man, an excessively bold man, foolishly charges into dangers and difficulties that could have been avoided. He is the one who goes looking for trouble, who enjoys risk for its own sake. But there is nothing virtuous about needlessly courting danger; such an attitude is foolhardy, not brave.

Secondly, Cowardice. Cowardice is the vice of refusing to take a prudent risk or making a prudent sacrifice because of fear. It is the abandonment of the greater good due to the terror of sustaining loss and hurt. The coward is so concerned with total self-preservation that he becomes crippled in relation to the world; the world presents itself not as an opportunity for attaining goods, but rather as a collection of personal threats.

Such a person is incapable of take advantage of the joy and happiness of life. The virtue of fortitude helps steer a middle course, as it helps overcome fear and yet restrains excessive boldness. It is interesting to
note that someone who is brash or cowardly will be unable to comprehend courage. The too-fearful person tells the courageous man, "You're crazy! Always taking risks! What a daredevil!" Whereas the too-bold person tells the courageous man, "You're a wimp! Always playing it careful, like a frightened chicken." One can always tell a balanced, virtuous person, because all those around him will be accusing him of opposite extremes. As G.K. Chesterton pointed out, if half the people declare a certain man to be too tall, and the other half declare him to be too short, one can reasonably assume that man is just the right height. This is the balanced life that every Christian must strive for, an integral dimension of which is fortitude.

**Fortitude, Fear, and Love**

An illuminating principle for understanding the virtue of courage is the following: In order to have courage you must have fear, and in order to have fear you must have love. Let's unpack this idea a little bit:

Courage means being able to overcome fear in order to pursue the greater good. This is not the same as being fearless; quite the contrary, the fearless person can never be truly brave. This is because fear is based on love for something, and a desire not to lose it. But if a person does not love the thing he risks, does not value it, then where is the merit in risking it? A suicidal maniac, for example, is not brave because he risks his life for anything; he is stupid for not recognizing the value of his life, and for so casually placing his life in danger.

A brave man experiences fear because he loves the thing he is risking, and so he is afraid to lose it. No one fears the loss of something he does not love and value. Yet what makes a person able to be brave is that he values the thing he is pursuing more than the thing he is risking. Courage means the willingness to sacrifice something lesser for something greater.

In the gospels Our Lord gives us two illustrations of this willingness to sacrifice. The first is of a man who finds a treasure buried in a field. The man sells "all that he owns" in order to purchase the field and acquire the treasure. The second story is about a man who finds a very valuable pearl ("the pearl of great price"), and sells everything he has in order to buy it.2 These parables do not describe brash men, men who liquidate their assets over any passing impulse; rather, these two men are prudent enough to recognize that which is most desirable in life, and are brave enough to sacrifice everything they have so they can possess it.

Really then, the first step in gaining fortitude is to ask yourself, "What do I value the most?" Another way to ask the same question is, "What do I fear losing the most?" We must deliberately construct a hierarchy in our mind, with the most valuable thing at the top, and then be willing to pursue that one thing at the expense of everything else. So what do you see as your number one goal in life? Is it high academic grades? Is it human society? Is it excitement, or deep emotional experience? Is it success at work, or maybe someone of the opposite sex? Or is it your relationship with God? Which of these things do you love/value the most? Which of these is the last thing in your life you'd be willing to sacrifice?

To have courage, it is absolutely essential to first have your priorities straight. A man who pursues a lesser good at the expense of a greater good is not brave, but stupid. It is stupid to exchange a dollar for a penny, and it is of no profit to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul. Courage is about ordering your loves and fears so that you fear most the loss of what is truly most valuable. Only then will you be able to overcome lesser fears in carrying out what is right. Pray then to the Holy Spirit for His gift of the "Fear of the Lord," which allows us to fear the loss of His love before all else.
The Two Forms of Courage: Attack and Endurance

Fortitude is lived out in different ways, according to different conditions of the concrete situation. The first of these involves a direct attack on whatever evil is attempting to hinder the promotion of goodness. This kind of courage is sometimes called holy wrath. Holy wrath is frequently neglected in the life of the Christian, since many believers make the mistake of identifying anger as an un-Christian feeling. They forget that there can be holy anger, an outrage which rises up against some atrocity. They forget that it is sometimes proper for us to get "fed up" about evil, and that if we just stay even keel, we will never do anything to change it. Our Lord certainly manifested this holy wrath on various occasions. For instance, in His diatribes against the Pharisees, or in His violently casting the money-changers out of the temple. He encountered evil, grew angry, and directed His anger in an attack upon that evil. We too must sometimes respond this way to evil in the world, by taking the offensive against it. Things like abortion, pornography, prostitution, blasphemy, etc... are not going to go away on their own, and only when we finally get upset about it will we get involved in the fight against these things.

For example, a video rental store near my hometown began aggressively advertising their pornographic films, placing them in the front and center of the store. Two college students noticed the change, were appalled, and went around the surrounding community collecting petitions for the store to rid itself of such movies.

Enough petitions were collected, and the store complied with the demand, which it surely would not have done had it not been for the efforts of these two principled young persons. The point is that our faith is not a faith of pure passivity. Courage demands that we be ready to act, to stand up for what we know to be right.

A second form of courage is needed for those times when the only viable option is to suffer patiently and endure the trials that beset us. In these situations, directly attacking the evil is ineffective; what is required is a persistent pursuit of the good in holy patience. In fact, patience is the supreme test of fortitude, for when a person has run out of other options, patience still enables him to hold his ground and persevere through any oppressing hardship. The measure of courage is endurance.

So, ask yourself, what hardship is present in your life, and just won't go away? Is it some addiction you can't break? Some disappointment you can't get over? Do you have some kind of chronic problem? Are your family relationships or your friendships always strained? Is there something you've never been good at? Are you depressed? Can you not figure out your vocation? What is that difficulty that you just can't fix, no matter how hard you try?

Because in that difficulty is the opportunity to prove yourself brave: will you persevere in doing the good, in spite of whatever problems continue to weigh on you? For example, let's say you can't manage to stop a certain vice: will you keep going to confession, and keep trying to do better? If so, that's fortitude. Or maybe you're in a marriage that is terribly unhappy, that is deeply unsatisfying to both you and your spouse.

Will you stick it out, continue trying to love your spouse and children, and asking God for the graces to bring peace into your family? If so, then you are proving your bravery, and you will be greatly rewarded for your courage. It's also important to keep in mind that endurance, or patience, is not a virtue for downcast, pessimistic, broken people. Patient, persevering people are not the ones who say, "Yeah, you know what, I don't even care anymore, so whatever." As opposed to the state of dejection, "to be patient means to preserve cheerfulness and serenity of mind in spite of injuries that result from the realization of the good." Patience is not something that belongs to sad, weak people, but rather to the strong and joyful. In the words of St. Hildegard, "Patience is the pillar which nothing can soften." The reason is that what
motivates patience, like what motivates all the virtues, is the desire for the good that we want to obtain. Patience comes from that wise realization that "What's worth having is worth waiting for."

But how will you know whether you should be courageous through attack or through endurance? The answer to this question is simply said, but hard to carry out: in order to discern how to be brave, one needs the virtue of prudence. (Recall that prudence is the virtue which allows us to see what decision is needed in any given situation).

Ultimately, such prudence comes from a prayerful relationship with God. A good daily prayer that asks for the twin virtues of prudence and fortitude is the following: "Lord, God, grant me the patience to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

**Fortitude and Hope**

Before a person can pursue the greater good courageously, he has to actually believe that the greater good exists and is capable of being obtained. This is Hope: to acknowledge the highest good and one's capacity to acquire it. The opposite of this is a form of despair: not to believe in supreme happiness, but to think that the best a person can achieve is passing pleasure or thrills.

The tragedy is the great number of those who really think that's it. They think, "Yeah, you can have a good time here or there, a few kicks, but perfect happiness is just an illusion." These people live in despair, and no one in despair can ever be courageous. They are incapable of ever being thoroughly brave, of laying down their lives for some higher good, because they don't even believe in a higher good.

The only source of fortitude is a constant reminding of the good that awaits us through the virtues, that is, complete enjoyment of all the basic human goods. Only perfect happiness is worth dying for, and really, only perfect happiness is worth living for.

**Our Top Fear: Fortitude and Public Witness**

Since courage is about overcoming fear for the sake of a greater good, it's probably a good idea to try and figure out what our top fear is. Time and time again, studies show what Americans are most afraid of: it isn't heights, it isn't mice, it isn't even death - it's public speaking. Americans especially dislike speaking publicly about important and controversial matters, because such conversation usually feels awkward, and Americans hate to say awkward things in public. And nothing is quite so important, controversial, and awkward as talking with conviction about one's religious beliefs. So most of us would rather never discuss our faith as long as we lived.

Still, as Catholics, speaking up about our faith isn't really an option. Our Lord sent out His first followers to spread His teaching and His salvation and the same is expected of us. Many Catholics like to quote a dictum attributed to St. Francis, "Preach always, and when necessary use words." This is indeed a beautiful saying, but no one who is serious about their faith, least of all St. Francis, would ever interpret him to mean that we can avoid using words as a tool for evangelizing to those around us.

We have got to start making a conscious effort to verbally witness to our faith, even in difficult situations. For example, when people say things against the Church, or against our moral code, when people make foul jokes against the dignity of women, or against the priesthood, we have a duty to stand up for what we believe. If we're at somebody's house, and something inappropriate comes on the screen, we need to have the guts to say something, or at least to leave the room.
Most importantly, we need to have the courage to try and invite people to Christ and the Church. Of course it's intimidating, any many will not come; our obligation is simply to make the invitation, and then let the Holy Spirit take care of the rest. (Think of how Philip simply said "Come and See" to Nathaniel.) If we don't even make the gesture, what does that say about our own dedication as Catholics?

Fulton Sheen told a story of two good friends who were partners together in a law-firm. The first was a Catholic, and the second an unbeliever. The latter became terminally ill, and upon visiting him the Catholic friend asked, "Don't you want to make your peace with God before you die?" The sick man answered him, "All the years we have been friends and colleagues, you've never once spoken with me about religious matters. If your faith has mattered so little to you in your life, of what use can it be to me at my death?"

Pray to God for the grace to overcome cowardice, for the strength to courageously witness to the truth of salvation before it is too late.

The Virtue of Fortitude - DOUG MCMANAMAN

The emotions have an innate need to be guided by reason. An emotionally healthy life is one in which the emotions are moderated by right reason. It follows that emotional stability and well-being are the result of a certain structuring in which the emotions of the concupiscible and irascible appetites are subject to a will that in turn is subject to reason.

An emotionally unhealthy life is one in which the emotions govern the will and reason. In this case, the emotions are not guided at all, or they are governed by a mind not rectified by reason via the intellectual virtues, such as wisdom and prudence.

There are a host of emotions that are left out in the treatment of temperance and its various parts, namely the emotions of the irascible appetite, which include fear, daring, hope, and despair. Life brings with it all sorts of difficulties, and it is through these emotions that we relate to them. To relate to these difficulties well requires that these emotions be moderated by the appropriate virtues, namely fortitude and its parts.

Now the greatest achievement of love is to learn to love the other as another self. Man's perfection consists in the possession of God in knowledge and love. A perfect love of another is thus one that wills that the happiness of knowing and loving God befall him or her. Human life is a quest for the Supreme Good, and a good human life is about willing the good, which is precisely what love is. In other words, human life is about learning to love. But love is difficult to achieve. It is difficult in general, only because love is channeled through virtue, and virtue is difficult. And it is difficult more specifically because special difficulties arise that become obstacles in the quest for the Supreme Good. Hence, the need for a host of virtues that will enable us to overcome these obstacles. Emotional health, in other words, demands that we aspire to something higher than ourselves and our own personal comfort. It demands that our life become a quest for the Supreme Good, that is, for God. It is this quest that brings movement and meaning to human life. It is true that any goal endows our life with movement, and thus a certain meaning. But a truly good life is one that aspires after what is truly good. Thus it is not possible to achieve an emotionally healthy life unless one aspires after what is truly good and truly larger than ourselves.

The typical hedonist today does not aspire to anything larger and higher, but settles for "feeling good". Such a life does not require fortitude. But a truly meaningful life, one whose meaning (direction) is determined in regards to man's true end — which is the knowledge and love of the greatest good — does indeed require a host of virtues belonging to fortitude. The virtue of temperance is thus not enough for emotional well-being, since temperance deals with the greatest pleasures, not the greatest difficulties.
Rather, it belongs to fortitude to remove the obstacles that withdraw the will from following reason on account of difficulties that give rise to fear and sorrow.

Fortitude in the Midst of Battle

Fortitude binds the will firmly to the good of reason in the face of the greatest evils, and the most fearful of all bodily evils is death. And so the very idea of fortitude presupposes that there are certain things we should love more than our own lives, certain things we ought to be willing to die for. We hold that the human person ought to love what is larger than himself, namely truth, justice, and the common good of the social whole. He ought to love the good of the entire civil community so much as to be willing to expose himself to the danger of death for its sake, and we would argue that he ought to love God (who is Truth) more than himself, and be willing to expose himself — not others — to the dangers of death for His sake, that is, for His cause. Fortitude is the virtue that moderates the emotions of fear and daring in accordance with right reason. It is not, as some are wont to believe, extraordinary daring. Sitting in a bathtub full of deadly snakes, or jumping from one speedboat to another, are acts of daring, not acts of fortitude. Had the person been attempting to rescue a little girl trapped in a pit of snakes, or a man unable to steer the speedboat as a result of a heart attack or stroke, we could speak of fortitude, but not without a pursuit of the good. St. Thomas writes:

Fortitude strengthens a man's mind against the greatest danger, which is that of death. Now fortitude is a virtue; and it is essential to virtue to tend to good; wherefore it is in order to pursue some good that man does not fly from the danger of death. But the dangers of death arising out of sickness, storms at sea, attacks from robbers, and the like, do not seem to come on a man through his pursuing some good. On the other hand, the dangers of death which occur in battle come to man directly on account of some good, because, to wit, he is defending the common good by a just fight. (ST. II-II.123, a. 5)

The willingness to fall in battle is not by any means limited to the context of an actual war between nations. There are "private battles", as in the case of a court judge who refuses to yield to death threats and delivers a just judgment nonetheless. John the Baptist is a perfect example of a man of fortitude with respect to a "private combat", for he did not refrain from speaking out against Herod for repudiating his first wife and marrying his brother's wife while Philip was still alive. This eventually led to his death. Similarly, St. Thomas More refused to take the oath enacted by Parliament. To do so would contravene the judgment of his conscience. As a result, he too lost his head and won the crown of martyrdom.

More current examples of fortitude might include a bishop or priest's refusal to provide a funeral mass for an unrepentant mafia boss, despite death threats from family members. Certainly the threat to court judges is still a very real possibility. Politicians who choose to take a firm stand on certain issues, in favor of justice, might very well risk assassination, especially in parts of the developing world. A fireman rushing into a burning building in order to save lives, knowing that there is a very good chance he will not come out alive, is indeed an instance of fortitude.

Fortitude is not fearlessness. Some people perform acts of apparent fortitude, that is, without the virtue. This occurs when they tend to what is difficult as though it were not, a behaviour due either to ignorance, that is, they are simply unaware of the extent of the dangers involved. Sometimes a person has so often escaped dangers in the past that on the basis of that experience he is rather confident of overcoming current dangers. Or, a person might possess a certain skill which leads him to think little of the dangers of battle, thinking himself more than capable of defending himself against them. Sometimes a person will act through the impulse of a passion, such as excessive anger, or sorrow, of which he wishes to rid himself. These are not acts of fortitude precisely because no moderation of fear is involved.

The truly brave man does not suppress his fear. He really experiences it, but holds fast to the good, moderating the fear of which he is fully cognizant. The principal act of fortitude is to endure, whereas
aggression or attack is its secondary act. For enduring fear is more difficult than attacking evil through
daring.

**Cowardice and Self-Loathing**

We are what we love, and it is really only by loving that which is larger than ourselves that we actually
become enlarged and enriched. It is the direction towards the sovereign good — which is unlimited —
that brings meaning to human life, and it is the pursuit of this great good that makes one's life great.

Now goodness is a property of being, just as growth is a property of living things, or as malleability is a
property of iron. Just as whatever is living grows, so too whatever has being is good. Goodness means
fullness of being. Accordingly, evil is a privation of being, a lack of something that ought to be. A
physical evil, for example, is a deformity of some kind. Think of a bird with only one wing. It is lacking
what it ought to have, namely another wing. From a physical point of view, the bird does not enjoy
fullness of being. It suffers from a physical evil.

Now the human person is both physical and moral. As a moral agent, the human person is capable of
bringing about moral evil. He does this by choosing a certain way. And since evil is a privation of being, a
lack of something that ought to be there, an evil choice is one that involves a deficient will, one that lacks
an order that it ought to have. For example, if I owe a person one hundred dollars, and I only pay back ten,
my will that he be given his due is deficient and lacking. Thus, my will is bad or evil, which is to say,
lacking what it ought to have.

Now a moral agent (a human person) is what he chooses. We become what we choose. Our character is
established by the choices that we make. In making an unjust choice, I become an unjust man. In choosing
to lie, I become a liar, a person who is untrustworthy. In choosing to kill, I become (am) a killer. In short,
in choosing deficiently, I become deficient, that is, my character is deficient.

Now at the risk of sounding like a dualist, let's just say that the evils of the soul are more to be feared than
the evils of the body; for the body is destructible, while the soul is not. For example, it is better to have
good character and missing fingers than to have all ten fingers and a morally bad character. Moreover, the
evils of the body are more to be feared than the evils of external things. Hence, it is better to lose all four
tires than all five fingers. And so it follows that it is unreasonable to incur evils of the soul in order to
avoid bodily evils, such as a physical beating or even death, or worse, evils of external things, such as the
loss of money or popularity. So too it is unreasonable to endure bodily evils in order to avoid the loss of
money or honors from those of questionable character. But the one lacking fortitude loves "external
goods" and the goods of the body (temporal goods) more than his character, more than the common good,
and more than the sovereign good, namely God. His love is thus disordered.

Now, the object of the will is the good. The will is drawn to something only because it sees it as a good.
You and I are basically good, insofar as we have being. That is why we have a natural love for ourselves.
But if we begin to make choices that are morally evil (deficient), we establish ourselves as deficient. But
we do not love what is deficient. If we have any love for something, it is only insofar as it is good. I might
love my new car as far as it drives well and has good gas mileage, but the brake lights are smashed and
there is a large dent in the passenger door, and it is missing a back seat. Consequently, I am not entirely
happy with it. Similarly, as morally deficient, we are not entirely happy with ourselves, and the more we
plunge into moral depravity, the more unhappy with ourselves do we become, that is, the more our self-
loathing increases. Thus, the one who lacks fortitude cannot but loath himself from the very depths of his
conscience. What he loathes is his small moral stature. That is why he can never enjoy the peace that he
seeks to maintain by refusing to endure the difficult and the fearful. He has allowed his fear to veer him
off the course that reason has laid out for him. He is dominated more or less to some degree, by fear. And
as his fear is not moderated by reason, it does not receive the perfection it requires, leaving him
emotionally out of kilter. It is in this way that those who lack fortitude and do nothing about it set themselves up for a low grade depression, a profound dissatisfaction with themselves, that they will have to endure later if not sooner.

Certainly temporal evils are to be feared to some degree. Love of temporal goods can be reasonable, that is, when they are loved not so much for their own sake, but for the sake of higher goods. It is reasonable to fear the loss of one's house, because a house can be instrumental in attaining higher goods, such as the goods of virtue. It is true that I love my body for its own sake, but from another angle I also love my arms and legs insofar as they are instrumental in attaining higher goods, namely virtue. But our love for bodily and external goods should not be so great as to hinder us from serving higher goods, and they are not to be despised in so far as they are instrumental towards attaining goods of the soul.

And so we ought to learn to moderate the emotion of daring, which moves us to attack difficult evils that loom on the horizon. What is needed when faced with a threatening situation is a carefully thought out battle plan, one whose ultimate aim is, again, to serve higher goods. Inordinate daring (foolhardiness) can needlessly expose us and others to the loss of external goods that are instrumental to these higher goods. True fortitude attacks evil at that point when not doing so would endanger greater goods. Consider, for example, the bishop or priest who chooses to significantly lighten the weight of his preaching at a particular time for fear of bringing down upon himself the wrath of the state, thereby allowing members of the Church to remain in ignorance, or allowing a portion of the Church to be scandalized. This is to love temporal goods too much. Or consider politicians who choose not to uphold what they know to be true and just for fear of losing office. It is often the case that people allow their moral and political views to be shaped by the *zeitgeist*, that is, by what is current and popular, in order to minimize friction and the chances of finding oneself friendless or unemployed. Much less are such people willing to die for what is true and just. But one must be willing to attack evil, despite temporal losses, in order to preserve virtue in others.

**Magnanimity**

Anyone who has worked with teenagers knows that the happiest and most emotionally healthy of them are those who aspire after great and honorable ends. And certainly not all of them do. It is not uncommon to see hordes of teenagers loitering every night at the local Donut shop or mall, doing very little with their lives if anything at all. This is *pusillanimity*, or smallness of soul. This rather pusillanomious existence is by no means limited to teenagers. Many adults have settled for a very small existence, which usually includes but does not seem to go far beyond a house with a well manicured lawn, a colorful garden, a cottage perhaps, and sometimes a life that deliberately excludes children, but not pets. These things are not evil in themselves. Rather, it is the lack of aspiration towards what is worthy of great honor that is small and deficient. The emotion that suffers in this case is the emotion of hope; for the virtue of magnanimity perfects hope and involves a stretching forth of the mind to great honors. There is no emotional wholeness without such a stretching forth to the great. Many people are under the false impression that striving after a great honor is about the pursuit of financial success or great wealth. The reason is that financial success is what our culture tends to honor most. In a hedonistic culture in which pleasure is regarded as the principal good, a life in pursuit of wealth is the only life that makes any sense; for wealth buys pleasures.

We honor great athletes, but athletic achievement is not great, at least not absolutely. A great athlete is not necessarily a great man. Neither is an intelligent and well educated man necessarily great and worthy of honor. But magnanimity is about the pursuit of great honors, because honor is the greatest of external things. But persons are honored principally on account of their virtue. Moral excellence is greater and more worthy of honor than is athletic and even academic excellence. Magnanimity is thus not so much the pursuit of Olympic gold, or musical stardom, or financial success, much less fame and international repute, as it is the pursuit of great moral achievement.
Magnanimity aspires after moral excellence, and since generosity, gratitude, and beneficence savor of excellence, the magnanimous man is ready to perform acts of great generosity, gratitude, and extraordinary beneficence. The magnanimous do not have such a high regard for external goods or a fear of evils such that they are inclined to give up the pursuit of justice or any other virtue. Thus, they do not conceal truth on account of fear, nor are they given over to complaining. Bellyaching betrays a defect of magnanimity in that the mind gives way too readily to external evils. Such vices are contrary to moral excellence.

But neither do the magnanimous despise wealth or great repute. They regard them as useful for accomplishing deeds of virtue. That is why they do not love them so much that they are willing to forgo virtue for their sake. Hence, an emotionally healthy and truly magnanimous person is neither very joyful at obtaining such goods, nor terribly grieved at their loss.

Now every virtue brings a certain beauty to human character, but magnanimity adds a certain luster over and above the others, giving them an added greatness, thus raising the stature of human character. That is why the magnanimous have beautiful character that, by virtue of the unity between matter and spirit, manifests in the countenance.

**Magnanimity and its Excesses (presumption, vainglory, ambition)**

In order to refine our understanding of this virtue and better appreciate what it is and isn't, let us glance briefly at its excesses. Firstly, magnanimity is not incompatible with humility. Magnanimity involves the recognition in oneself of something great which comes from God, namely divine grace and one's natural gifts; but the magnanimous recognize their own defects and the weakness of human nature, that is, their inclination to sin and complete dependence upon divine grace. The magnanimous are inclined to deem themselves worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts they hold from God. But humility allows them to keep their own deficiency at the forefront of their minds. As St. Thomas Aquinas writes: "Humility makes us honor others and esteem them better than ourselves", for we see some of God's gifts in them, gifts that we don't have. Confidence in oneself and others is a part of magnanimity, but confidence in oneself can be inordinate by way of excess. This is **presumption**, and it is rooted in an inaccurate assessment of oneself. The presumptuous tend to what is above their power. Their hope in themselves is disordered, because their love for themselves is disordered. That is why presumption tends to go hand in hand with personal pride, the inordinate love of one's own excellence.

Having absolutely no confidence in anyone is certainly not a sign of emotional health. The other extreme, overconfidence in others, stems from a lack of sound observation, an inability or refusal to see the defects of others. This flaw can sometimes be disguised as virtue, that is, as a "positive disposition". But there is nothing virtuous in being positive about a situation that has not been properly assessed, just as there is nothing virtuous in being negative when there is much to be confident about.

The quest for honor is inordinate when a person desires the recognition of an excellence that he does not have, thus wanting more than his fair share of honors, and when a person desires honor for himself without referring it to God. The latter amounts to a lack of gratitude, which is a part of justice. Finally, the quest for honor is inordinate when it is pursued for the sake of being honored, as if to rest in the honor itself. This is **ambition**. But the truly magnanimous do not love themselves more than others; rather, they love the other as another self, and for God's sake. They desire the recognition of their own excellence only to the degree that it would profit others. But the heart of the ambitious rests in honor itself, without reference to the profit of others.

**Vainglory** is the inordinate desire for glory (to be known by others). Such desire for glory is inordinate when it is desired for its own sake, rather than as being useful for something greater, for example, that
God may be more known and loved by others, or that human beings may be made better on account of such knowledge. Mother Teresa, for example, was very well known, but she did not desire such reputation, and yet her renown made innumerable people better.

Vainglory is particularly dangerous in that it renders us presumptuous and too self-confident, and presumption blinds us to the need to seek counsel from others. That is why vainglory begets disobedience, boastfulness, hypocrisy, contention, obstinacy, discord, and interestingly enough, the love of novelties. The vain strive to make known their excellence by showing that they are not inferior to others. They do this in a number of ways. Since intellect is the most superior power in man, the vain will strive to show intellectual superiority. Thus, they do not readily give up their opinion when confronted with evidence of its weakness and inferiority. This is obstinacy, an excessive or stubborn attachment to one's opinion. And since the will is also a superior power, the person who strives to make known his excellence will exhibit a stubborn attachment to his own will. Such a person rarely agrees with others. This is discord, which begets quarreling or contentiousness. And a contentious person can hardly be expected to obey the commands of his superiors. Thus, he is inclined to disobedience. Finally, vainglory begets a love of novelties. For the vain wish to stand out from the rest, so they are given over to novelties which tend to grab our attention and call for greater admiration.

**Magnificence**

A right relationship to one's money is critical for emotional well-being. Emotional health demands that we stretch forth to that which is larger than the self, and so it demands of those with great wealth that they aspire to do something great with it. Only a person of great wealth is capable of doing great things with that wealth, and it is magnificence that intends the production of a great work at great expense. There is no end of human work that is as great as the honor of God. And so the magnificent man looks for opportunities to do a great work that God may be more honored. This is how magnificence is connected to genuine love. Recall that genuine human love wills that the happiness of knowing and loving God befall another. Hence, this love seeks the honor of God, desires that God be glorified and thus more loved. Thus, charity in the heart of one who has wealth is magnificent.

Now things that pertain to my own person are certainly good, but better than my private good is the good of the civil community at large; for it is a larger good. But better than both are things that pertain to God. That is why a magnificent person, who aspires to the largest and greatest, will not choose, first and foremost, to be lavish towards himself; for doing so is not particularly great. The virtue of religion is the most perfect part of the virtue of justice. Religion seeks to render to God the honor and thanks we owe Him. Thus one cannot be truly magnificent without the virtue of religion, and by the same token, one cannot be emotionally healthy without the entire spectrum of human emotion subordinated to a will disposed by the virtue of religion.

But the magnificent man will also intend a great work at great expense for the honor of a person deserving of great honor, or for the honor of the entire state. The defect of magnificence is the mean or miserly heart whose intention is principally focused on spending the least amount possible. He does not shrink from producing a measly work so long as he spends little.

Once, while admiring a beautiful old Church in a poor area of a small Canadian town, a friend remarked how magnificent the Church was. Behind that magnificent Church were magnificent people who built it at great expense. And yet there is a Church that was recently built in one of the wealthiest towns in the country, a Church that is anything but magnificent. In fact, it is less than ordinary, and its appearance almost suggests a kind of miserliness, as if the principal intention was to reduce cost rather than build a great Church that speaks of the greatness and majesty of God. The excess of magnificence, however, is waste or wastefulness, wherein expenditure exceeds the value of the work.
Patience

Life brings with it all sorts of hardships, many of which are inflicted by others. Things rarely go our way, and human beings are continually developing psychologically and emotionally. We can be very difficult to put up with at different times throughout our lives. We are often the cause of great sorrow to others, and others to us. Hardships lead to sorrow, and sorrow in turn can beget anger. Anger can beget hatred, which in turn can lead to unjust injury, either verbal or physical. That is why the emotion of sorrow needs to be moderated according to reason. In this way, we allow sorrow to move us towards a more complete realization of the good, just as moderated anger helps in the execution of reason's response to injustice. A patient teacher, for example, will allow her sorrow to move her to find new and improved ways of teaching a lesson so as to be more easily understood by those students that are not learning.

The virtue of patience is that habit by which we endure hardship so that we maintain the course of action set out by reason. The patient man is not inordinately saddened by the things which cause him hurt. The defect of patience is, of course, impatience, which is an inability to bear hardship, and which involves a loss of self-possession. This results in the forsaking of the good on account of the sorrow caused thereby. Many people regard Robert Latimer as a courageous man because he had "the nerve" to murder his handicapped daughter and face the justice system in order to have the law against euthanasia changed. He was a daring man, but not a man of fortitude. Latimer's actions could never have been a matter of fortitude, because murdering a handicapped child is intrinsically unjust, and his decision to murder her bespeaks a lack of patience, an inability to deal with the sorrow caused by the hardships of raising a handicapped child.

It is not inconsistent with patience to rise up against one who inflicts injustice. Patience is not spinelessness, the excess of meekness. The excess of patience is impassivity. The impassive do not allow themselves to be moved by sorrow. They endure it when they should not, thereby allowing the situation that is causing the hardship to perpetuate — a situation that isn't necessarily unjust, but one that requires effective remedy. Moreover, there is nothing praiseworthy about "patiently" enduring harm against others, against the common good, or against the divine honor. Such "patience" is merely a front that disguises a cowardly and unjust spirit.

Longanimity is the virtue that moderates hope in that it bears upon a good that is a long way off. The delay of the hoped for good causes sorrow, which is difficult to endure, and so in this sense longanimity has something in common with patience. Perhaps we can call its defect "brevanimity". The "brevanimous" might include those who begin projects enthusiastically, but leave them undone, or those who seem to always need a change. And perhaps the excess of longanimity is a kind of impassivity in which one fails to do what is required to bring about the good that is a long way off.

Constancy is the virtue by which a person endures the toil involved in persistently accomplishing a good work. It belongs to perseverance to persist in good for a long time until the end. Perseverance moderates the emotion of fear as it regards weariness or failure on account of the delay. It differs from constancy in that constancy makes a man persist firmly in good against difficulties arising from external hindrances.

The defect of perseverance is effeminacy. The effeminate are ready to forsake a good on account of difficulties which they cannot endure. Delicacy, according to Aquinas, is a kind of effeminacy and is thus a vice contrary to perseverance. The delicate, after considering the toil involved in a difficult work, will naturally recoil, whereas the effeminate are principally focused on the lack of pleasure involved in a particular work.

The excess of perseverance is pertinacity, which exceeds the mean of perseverance appointed by reason. The pertinacious man persists inordinately in something against many difficulties. He desires the
proximate end too much. The pertinacious and the effeminate have something in common, for the pertinacious shun the pain involved in not realizing the pleasure of the end that he loves and pursues inordinately.

NOTE
Aquinas writes: "those things that are desired for their own sake, some are desired for their own sake alone, and never for the sake of something else, such as happiness which is the last end; while some are desired, not only for their own sake, inasmuch as they have an aspect of goodness in themselves, even if no further good accrued to us through them, but also for the sake of something else, inasmuch as they are conducive to some more perfect good." (S.T. II-II, Q. 145, ad. 1)