



The Importance of the Virtue Program



Why do we need to develop the virtues?

Each of us can recognize that our human nature is wounded due to the effects of Original Sin because it is very difficult to maintain moral balance in our lives. We must combat, above all, selfishness and pride which results in our lack of perfect love for God and our neighbor. Living virtuous lives helps us to live in true peace and joy, because we “not only perform good acts but give the best of ourselves” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1803) Therefore, we should all want to pursue this goal. However, developing the virtues is not something that we simply accomplish through our own will power. “Christ’s gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues” (CCC 1811).

“A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good” (*Compendium*, question n. 377). At the core of all virtue is love but actions are needed to express this love. “Just as fire hoses are needed to convey and direct water from its source to where the fire rages, virtue is needed to establish a connective between the source of love and the place where love is needed. No person, no matter how loving he claims to be, can be of any help to himself or anyone else on a moral level if he does not possess virtue. A soldier without courage, a doctor without care, a teacher without patience, a parent without prudence, a spouse without fidelity, a priest without faith, a leader without determination, a magistrate without integrity, and a friend without loyalty are all partners to futility, not because they lack love, but because they lack the virtue to express it. (*The Heart of Virtue, Lessons from Life and Literature Illustrating the Beauty and Value of Moral Character*, Donald de Marco, Ignatius Press).

Our Diocesan Virtue Program to be used in the Catholic schools and parishes, and the home connection for the parents will help in the development of the virtues in the young people. Children need this formation. It is through living the virtues that a person develops moral character because the virtuous person “pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions” (CCC 1803). The “cornerstone of the moral life” is based upon the Theological and the

Cardinal Virtues. Therefore, Part I of the Virtue Program is comprised of these virtues.

The Theological Virtues

The Theological Virtues of faith, hope, and charity are infused along with sanctifying grace into the soul of the person at Baptism. These virtues are supernatural, meaning that they are above our nature. The virtues of faith, hope, and charity form the foundation of the Christian life because they bestow on us the capacity to live in a relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This relationship consists of acting as God’s children by believing in Him and everything that He has revealed to us; hoping in His promises because we can trust Jesus, as the Scripture says, “He Who made the promise is trustworthy” (*Hebrews 9:23*); and loving our neighbor because of our love for Christ.

We grow in the virtues of faith, hope and charity by nourishing them through reading the Word of God, begging the Lord in daily prayer to increase them in us, receiving the Sacraments to strengthen us to persevere in living the virtues, studying the Faith in an ongoing way, cooperating with the Holy Spirit, following His call to do what is good and shun what is evil, and by serving our neighbor through works of charity.

The Cardinal Virtues

The Theological Virtues inform and give life to the Cardinal Virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. These 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” (CCC, p. 1804).

We grow in the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance through human effort. This involves yearly teaching on the virtues, the practice of making deliberate acts of right judgment, being fair, having courage and exercising moderation. Further, perseverance

through repeated efforts in cooperation with God's grace allows the practice of virtue to become purified and elevated to a supernatural level.

Transition from the Textbook to the Virtues

The Diocesan Virtue Program is to be used in conjunction with an approved religion textbook. In receiving feedback from Catholic schools and parish programs, some teachers have asked how to make the transition from teaching a chapter from the textbook, such as on Baptism in first grade or on Scripture in the ninth grade, and then switch to teaching about a virtue. This can be done in a few, brief phrases.

1) Receiving a teaching about the Faith helps us to know what our loving God has done for us. Example: In our class we see how much God loves us because He has given us the gift of Baptism, by which we become His children.

2) We want to show our love for God through a response. This response to God's love is by the way that we live. We want to develop good habits and we call good habits the virtues. Today, we are also going to talk about prudence. The virtue of prudence is about making good decisions...

Therefore, the transition to teach about the virtues is actually our response to God's love, which we want to offer to Him after learning and recognizing what He has given us through the teaching that was presented.

Please take the time to help the catechists to use the Virtue Program. The Virtue Program is now on-line. Please print the copies for your catechists from the Website as the page with the practices to foster each virtue have been greatly expanded since May, making it even easier to use. The arduous task of growing in virtue is worth it because a virtuous person is a person whose life is characterized by a sense of vitality, purpose and joy regardless of circumstances.