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Virtue: Being Made Perfect in Christ

Cardinal Virtues

Introduction

1.) Virtues can be classified as natural or supernatural, infused or acquired, and then related to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. At this point, it may sound more like a theological train wreck of lists. So, how can we bring them together into a single focal point? One way is to look at the virtues, not as isolated items, but as a single action or person. For this reason, we look to Him who is *"the way, the truth, and the life."*¹ In the person of Jesus Christ Our Lord, we find the perfect model of virtue and holiness. The Hypostatic Union is the perfect union of humanity and divinity in one person, so we can proclaim that Jesus is *"true man and true God."*² In this sense, Christ Our Lord is our focal point and foundation as we delve into the cardinal and theological virtues.

2.) Consider for a moment that we are created body and soul. Our humanity has a spiritual soul with the spark of divinity through sanctifying grace. At this point, you may be wondering how to make this head trip make sense. How does this introduce us to virtue?

3.) In the first paragraph, I mentioned focusing on a single action. This action is the grace of God, perfecting both our humanity **AND** making us holy. *"The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God."*³ At work in our heart, mind, body, and soul is the redemption merited by Christ Our Lord. The work we refer to is the work of grace and the Holy Spirit, healing the division between man and God, creating the same union found in Our Redeemer.

¹ John 14:6

² Profession of the Fathers, Councils of Nicaea 325 and Constantinople 381, Canons and Decrees, Norman Tanner

³ CCC #1803, St. Gregory of Nyssa, De beatitudinibus, 1: PG 44, 12000

Virtue – God and Man

4.) **Moral or Cardinal Virtue.** These virtues, sometimes called *human virtues*, are directed at perfecting our humanity. Moral virtue is that habit of seeking out what is good in every situation. Assisted by grace, they strengthen our mind and heart, while also curbing and training our passions. As the Catechism states,

*“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**”.*

5.) What does that mean for us? Moral good or moral virtue can be discerned with human reason and effort. So does this mean it's all on us, or that I can perfect myself? Our humanity, while not completely evil and corrupt, is weakened and susceptible to error. We have the imperfect desire to do good, but we cannot control and govern our actions with divine assistance. (*Note: that's where the theological virtues and the Holy Spirit come in*).

So, in conclusion, the moral/cardinal virtues serve to perfect our humanity. The end goal is to have a humanity like Christ, in perfect union with the Father. Jesus did not lose his humanity; it was perfected! Moral virtues lay the foundation and prepare the communion with divine love. ⁴ There are many good habits that we can call virtues. The virtues fall under 4 main groups: **prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance**. God does not hide goodness from us; He invites us into it. Ask the Lord for His grace to seek, find, and use the virtues within our reach. In the next part, we'll look at them individually.

"Seek, and you will find; ask, and it will be given; knock, and it shall be opened."

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⁴ CCC #1804