

Virtues – The Atomic Habits of Catholicism

Objective: This topic is intended to encourage members to think deeply about their choices. Fathers' Team members all agree that we want to follow the path of virtue rather than vice, but in moments of weakness, or when we doubt our faith, do we always know that the path of virtue is better than the path of vice?

Our culture finds vices to be entertaining, maybe even desirable (Gilligan's Island representing 7 deadly sins, Kardashians etc ...). In a world that promotes vices that are self centered and pleasure seeking – but ultimately lead to destruction, virtues are the antidote to cure the sickness of the culture.

In his New York Times Bestseller, James Clear defines “Atomic Habit” as routines of immense power. He recommends implementing habits that allow us to get 1% better every day. In order to create an Atomic Habit, don't focus on the Outcome (lose 10 lbs), nor the Process (No more snacking) but rather your Identity (I am committed to a healthy lifestyle). Focusing on identity is the best way to create good habits, as well as eliminate bad ones. The same can be applied in our Spiritual lives. Identity (I am a child of God), Process (Virtues), Outcome (deeper connection with God, leading to a more fulfilling life). Virtues are the Atomic Habits of our faith!!!!

While vices (bad habits) may bring near term momentary satisfaction, they have long term detrimental consequences. Virtues require near term sacrifice - however provide desirable long term rewards. Vices make us a slave, virtues set us free. Vices separate us from God, virtues unite us with God in becoming the best version of ourselves.

Man has struggled with virtue vs. vices since the beginning of time. St. Paul names the theological virtues as faith, hope and love. 4th Century Bishop Ambrose declared the cardinal virtues as temperance, justice, prudence and fortitude. In 590 AD, Pope Gregory created the Capital Virtues of:

- Chastity
- Temperance
- Charity
- Diligence
- Kindness
- Patience
- Humility

The lack of virtue results in a vice. For example, the lack of chastity is lust. Lack of temperance is gluttony. The same with charity – greed, diligence – sloth, kindness – envy, patience – wrath, humility – pride.

God has planted seeds of virtue in each of us. By leading a virtuous life, we blossom by becoming what we are meant to be.

Song Suggestion: City of God (Green book p. 100, Red book #663)

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Deuteronomy 30:19: I have set before you death and life. Choose life.

Ephesians 5: 14-15: Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead and Christ will give you light. Watch carefully then how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Philippians 3:19 Their God is their stomach

Psalms 90:12 Make us know the shortness of life, that we may gain wisdom of heart

Catechism 1833-1839

Virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do good. The human virtues are stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that govern our acts, order our passions, and guide our conduct in accordance with reason and faith. They can be grouped around the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

- Prudence disposes the practical reason to discern, in every circumstance, our true good and to choose the right means for achieving it.
- Justice consists in the firm and constant will to give God and neighbor their due.
- Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.
- Temperance moderates the attraction of the pleasures of the senses and provides balance in the use of created goods.

The moral virtues grow through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle. Divine grace purifies and elevates them.

Saint: St. Hallvard. According to tradition, Hallvard was a Norwegian, son of Vebjorn of Husaby. He became a trader in the Baltic Islands. While defending a woman who bought sanctuary on his ship from three men accusing her of theft (he offered to make restitution to them), he was killed, with the woman, by arrows from the men. Though they attached a stone to his body when they cast it into the sea, it came to the surface, and the whole story came out. He has long been revered as a martyr for his defense of an innocent person and is the patron saint of Oslo. His feast day is May 15. https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=658

Vignette: – In 1726, at the age of 20, Benjamin Franklin set his loftiest goal: the attainment of moral perfection. On a return trip from England, he developed a list of 13 virtues which he believed was a complete list for his aim of moral perfection. Benjamin Franklin lists his virtues as temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquillity, chastity, and humility

Benjamin Franklin made it his daily goal to reflect daily on what he read, learned and the actions he took. He would determine if his actions aligned with his 13 virtues and record them in his journal. He practiced this method throughout his lifetime, continually making adjustments to his thoughts and actions to achieve his aim for moral perfection.

Benjamin Franklin did not claim that he achieved moral perfection, but his life was enriched because of his practice. This story of self-determination and a diligent practice striving to live a virtuous life provides a spark so that we may live a more virtuous life.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

What are the bad habits in your life that are holding you back?

What's the difference between an innocent indulgence and a vice?

Which virtue comes to you naturally?? Which one requires the most work??

If virtues lead to a rewarding life, why do we resist them so much?

How does God want me to have fun?

Many influences in our culture promote vice, and laugh at virtue, What are some of these influences in my life?

If I'm not choosing the virtuous path, how does that affect my attitude toward my wife's and children's choices?

When was the last time I talked with my children about the merits of virtues?

Action Plan:

- For the next seven weeks, identify one of the seven cardinal virtues that will be your theme that week. Meditate upon that theme and actively seek opportunities to put it into action. Like Ben Franklin, keep a journal of your progress.

Resources:

<http://www.catholictradition.org/Saints/virtue2.htm>

<https://spsdfw.org/virtues-of-the-month>

<https://integratedcatholiclife.org/2016/03/clements-set-your-teen-up-for-a-life-of-virtue>

www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/virtue

<https://www.mitchschmidtke.com/stories-of-virtue-inspire-us/>

<https://integratedcatholiclife.org/2014/02/mary-hartwell-learning-the-virtues-that-lead-you-to-god-guardini>

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