



**Come Follow Me: The Nature of Christian Virtues
and How the Church Should Cultivate Them**

Fr. Roger J. Landry • Passages Webinar • April 20, 2020

Continuing the Pilgrimage of Life



- Passages makes possible following in Jesus' footsteps in the Holy Land.
- The pilgrimage doesn't cease with a return flight from Ben Gurion Airport, but is meant to continue in life.
- What does it mean to continue that journey?
- "Whoever he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 Jn 2:6)

Walking as Jesus Walked



- Christianity is not a classroom but a way of life.
- Jesus identifies himself as “the Way” (Jn 14:6) and calls each of us, “Follow me!” (Jn 212:22)
- St. Peter: “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21).
- The first disciples in Antioch were popularly called those “belonging to the Way” (Acts 9:2).

Imitating Jesus



- Jesus: “I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:15).
- To imitate Jesus does not mean imitation all of his concrete actions – which would be impossible, like, for example, so many of his miracles – but to imitate his virtues.
- Jesus does this when he calls us to “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

Identifying with Jesus



- Jesus calls us not just to imitation, understood as extrinsic conformity, but to identification, as we act together with him, as branches on the vine. Without him we can do nothing; with him we can bear great fruit (Jn 15:1-8).
- Jesus prioritized this inward identification more than outward imitation.
- “Every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit” (Mt 7:17-19).
- We need to focus on the tree that bears good fruit!

The Importance of Virtues



- This brings us to the importance of *virtues* in Christian morality.
- Many think that morality deals exclusively with the good or evil of human acts.
- For example, the Ten Commandments, which order certain actions and forbid others.
- Or Jesus' summary of the law and the prophets as loving God with all our mind, heart soul and strength and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Lk 10:27).
- Or even Jesus' "new" commandment, "his" to love others as he has first loved us (Jn 13:34; 15:12).

The Importance of Character



- But Jesus is concerned not just with *acts* of love, but in helping us to become *people* who love like he loves.
- He is concerned with *character*.
- He wants to form in us *habits* so that we will do good and avoid evil more easily, more routinely, more completely.
- John Paul II: “The love and life of the Gospel cannot be thought of first and foremost as a kind of precept” (VS 23).

Reaping What We Sow



- That does not mean, of course, that Jesus is not concerned with acts and individual choices! He is!
- Individual acts matter. He says that they can matter eternally (Mt 25:31-46).
- But he doesn't stop with individual acts. He wants us to form habits so that we will not only do good but become (morally) good.
- Mother Teresa frequently repeated the aphorism: "Sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."

Essence of Christianity



- The heart of Christianity is not our moral action, but the unveiling of the mystery of the Trinity and the communication of divine life and knowledge to the human person.
- Jesus is the incarnation of the love of God, who came to enflesh “the Way, the Truth, the Life” (Jn 14:6) and make possible for us a totally new way of living in communion with God and others.
- The kerygma is not “love your neighbor” but proclamation of Christ’s *life* that he wants us to share in this world and forever.

Living in Christ



- Christ has come so that we might have communion with him and, in him, with each other (1 John 1:3).
- As we see with Mary, with the Apostles, with the Rich Young Man, this involves vocation, response, following, discipleship, imitation and identification.
- This life is the path of holiness, which is God's will for us (1 Thess 4:3; Lev 11:44; Mt 5:48).
- Ultimately we're called to say, like St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

The Importance of Virtues Today



- There are many reasons why Christians must rediscover the importance of virtues, grow in them, and help others to grow in them.
- Our society needs it. You name the problem and at its root is almost certainly a lack of virtue: cowardice, dishonesty, anger and hatred, addictions, overeating and drinking, using and abusing others, laziness, sexual objectification, disloyalty, envy, greed, impatience, vanity, untrustworthiness, irresponsibility, pride.

The COVID-19 Situation



- The situation of the coronavirus pandemic has brought many of them to the fore. We have seen the need for:
 - Courage
 - Prudence
 - Justice
 - Temperance
 - Faith
 - Hope
 - Charity

Virtues versus Values



- Many elements in culture today prefer to speak about *values*, not *virtues*. Values are self-generated.
- They seek “values clarification” not “virtue formation.”
- There’s a focus on feelings, on “self-identifying,” rather than on any type of objective good in action or in persons.

Virtues versus Values



- It's enough that one feels like a good person, rather than actually is a good person, according to basic standards of character.
- Many have reduced all virtues essentially to being “nice,” because they’ve reduced all goods to pleasure, comfort and contentment, because they’re implicitly materialists.
- There’s “virtue signaling,” which is more accurately “value signaling.”

The Purpose of Ethics



- There's an explosion in the study of ethics. Discussion of ethics – like in bioethical committees in hospitals – often becomes an end, and it focuses more on doing than being.
- Ethics without virtue is an illusion, *because the purpose of ethics is to make people good.*
- The various inadequate moral philosophies of the age – utilitarianism, pragmatism, emotivism, consequentialism, proportionalism, situational ethics – fail to account for the basic connection between acts and persons and the connection of freedom to truth, the good and responsibility. There's an inadequate anthropology.

The Nature of Virtue



- A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good.
- Virtues perfect our mind and will, order our emotions, and guide our conduct.
- They come from the word *vis*, which means power.
- They allow us not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of ourselves, with our whole being.
- They help us become free, attain self-mastery, and joy in leading the good life.

The Nature of Virtue



- Virtues are acquired through repeated good actions. They are the *fruit* and *seed* of good acts.
- Old joke about the way to get to Carnegie Hall
- Virtues forge our character.
- St. Gregory of Nyssa: “We are in a certain way our own parents, creating ourselves as we will, by our decisions.”

The Nature of Virtue



- Aristotle taught that a virtue is the golden mean between the extremes (vices) of deficiency and excess. St. Thomas Aquinas taught, based on Aristotle, *omnis virtus in medio consistit* (St. II-II, 146).

Cowardice	Courage	Rashness
Insensibility	Temperance	Self-indulgence
Meanness	Generosity	Prodigality
Pusillanimity	Magnanimity	Vanity
Lack of ambition	Proper Pride	Ambition
Lack of spirit	Patience	Irascibility
Understatement	Truthfulness	Boastfulness
Malicious enjoyment	Righteous Anger	Envy

The Cardinal Virtues



- In Christian moral theology, virtues are traditionally broken down into two categories: cardinal and theological virtues.
- The Cardinal virtue so called by St. Ambrose, because on these virtues the entire moral life is “hinged” (Latin: *cardo*, *cardinis*: hinge)
- They are prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude.
- They are found in Plato, Aristotle, as well as in Sacred Scripture: “If one loves justice, the fruits of her works are virtues; For she teaches *moderation and prudence, justice and fortitude*, and nothing in life is more useful for men than these” (Wis 8:7).

The Cardinal Virtues



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

The Cardinal Virtues



- Prudence is misunderstood today when it is equated with intelligence rather than understanding, with subjectivism rather than insight into objective realities.
- Justice is misunderstood when it is calculating, rather than intuitive, when it is external and social and unattractive (like mere law).
- Temperance is misunderstood when thought of as suppression, repression, lack of passion.
- Fortitude is misunderstood when it is equated with fearlessness or foolhardiness.

The Theological Virtues



- “Faith, hope, love abide” (1 Cor 13:13)
- “We remember before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 1:3).
- They are called “theological” because they have God as their origin, motive and object and adapt our faculties to live in communion with God.
- They are gifts of God infused into the souls of the faithful, animating Christian moral action.

The Theological Virtues



- **Faith:** by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, because he is truth itself.
- **Hope:** by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.
- **Charity:** by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. Charity inspires all of the Christian virtues and “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14).

Other Virtues



- In traditional theology, other virtues are linked to the four cardinal virtues. St. Thomas Aquinas describes 50 virtues one-by-one, and his list is by no means complete.
- With justice, for example, he links religion, devotion, reverence, obedience, gratitude, truth, friendliness, generosity, and epikeia.
- With fortitude, he links magnanimity, proper ambition, magnificence, patience, and perseverance.
- With temperance he links abstinence, meekness, clemency, modesty, and studiousness.

Virtues in Christ and Christians



- “Love is patient, ... kind, ... not jealous, ... not pompous, ... not inflated, ... not rude, ... does not seek its own interests, ... is not quick-tempered, ... does not brood over injury, ... does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth, ... bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Cor 13:4-7:)
- Rom 12:9-21 speaks about sincerity, hatred for evil, perseverance, affection, anticipation in showing honor, fervor, serving the Lord, hope, endurance, living in peace, not taking revenge, conquering evil with good.

Virtues in Christ and Christians



- Beatitudes speak about poverty of spirit, compassion for the suffering, meekness, hunger for holiness, being merciful, purity of heart, peacemaking, capacity to suffer for the faith.
- We seek to emulate and identify with Jesus' virtues in these and other ways.
- The seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit help us (Is 11:2) as does the 9-fold fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-3).

Cultivating Virtue



- Moral virtues are acquired by education, deliberate acts and perseverance purified and elevated by grace.
- We can focus on education, training, example, and supernatural means.

Cultivating Virtue via Education



- We need to teach the virtues at a time when values are being taught instead. This education happens not principally in schools but in homes, Churches, communities, cultures.
- We need to help them ask the bigger questions about what type of person they want to become.
- We need to connect the virtues to Christ and show their interconnectedness, since virtues all impact who we are.
- We need to use the imagination, literature, parables, illustrations, to show virtue in action.

Cultivating Virtue via Training



- Actually helping people to develop these good habits in action.
- We need to become coaches, mentors, piano teachers
- This involves rooting out vices, giving effective fraternal correction, since sin wounds the nature of the person and human solidarity, and to become virtuous, people need to escape enslavement to passions or ignorance.
- Training of freedom and linking it to the truth, to the good and to responsibility.
- Schools and communities of virtue.

Cultivating Virtue via Example



- Example is the greatest teacher.
- People are more persuaded by witnesses than instructions, by mystagogues than pedagogues.
- People need to see that it's possible, beautiful and joyful to live virtuously in a skeptical age.
- Saints are a great witness.
- The importance of “godparents.”

Cultivating Virtue via Supernatural Means



- Praying for the grace to grow in virtue.
- Asking for them specifically.
- Invoking the Holy Spirit's help.
- It's not easy for man, wounded by sin and its effects, to persevere in the virtuous life, but God wants to help and provides the means.

People for the Age



“Think for a moment about how hard it would be to become a saint if it were easy. If there were no wall to push up against, how could you develop your muscles? If there were no sparring partner to fight against, how could you develop yourself as a fighter? If there were no suffering in the world, how could you develop compassion? If there were no difficulties, how could you develop courage? ... If sanctity didn't cost anything, how could it be worth anything? Only in a bad world can we become good. Bad times are for good people.... But the other half of the process is just as true: good people are for bad times....” (Peter Kreeft, *Making Choices*).



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The screenshot shows the homepage of [catholicpreaching.com](http://www.catholicpreaching.com). The header features the site's logo, "Catholic Preaching" by Fr. Roger J. Landry, and a navigation menu with links for Home, Homilies, Articles, Plan of Life Book, Retreats, Teaching, and Biography. A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main content area begins with a "Welcome!" message from Fr. Landry, followed by a quote from Cardinal Edmund Szoka regarding the Ordination Rite. Below this, there are sections for "Most Recent Homilies", "Most Recent Articles", and "Most Recent Talks", each containing a list of recent posts with their titles and dates.

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Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diaconal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

*"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.
Believe what you read.
Teach what you believe.
Practice what you teach."*

Those words have never lost their resonance.

Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts.

It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,
Fr. Roger J. Landry

Most Recent Homilies	Most Recent Articles	Most Recent Talks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Bearing Fruit Attached to the Vine, 12th Wednesday (II), June 27, 2018Following the Lead of the Precursor, Solemnity of St. John the Baptist, June 24, 2018Placing Our Heart and Treasure in God, 11th Friday (II), June 22, 2018Longing to See God's Face in Prayer and in Others, 10th Friday (II), June 15, 2018The Surpassing Righteousness of Christ-like Merciful Love, 10th Thursday (II), June 14, 2018Greatest in the Kingdom, 10th Wednesday (II), June 13, 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Secular Push to Get Priests to Break the Seal, The Anchor, June 29, 2018Approaching the Suicide Surge with Honesty and Resolve, The Anchor, June 15, 2018The Abortion Exception to the Practice of Discrimination, The Anchor, June 1, 2018The Contemporary Attack on Motherhood, The Anchor, May 18, 2018The Euthanasia of Alfie Evans, The Anchor, May 4, 2018"Do Not Be Afraid of Holiness," The Anchor, April 20, 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Church and International Diplomacy, Acton University, June 20, 2018The Entrepreneurial Vocation, Acton University, June 20, 2018The Social Teaching of Pope St. John Paul II, Acton University, June 20, 2018The Necessity and Art of Trinitarian Prayer, Catholic Medical Association Boot Camp, June 18, 2018Christ, the Redeemer of Marriage: Living and Proclaiming the Gospel of the Sacramentality of Marriage at a Time When Sex Love,



Questions and Discussion