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## MORAL & THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

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*"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection."  
Colossians 3:12-14 (NABRE)*

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## Moral and Theological Virtues

### Introduction:

St. Paul's exhortation to the Philippians, "*Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*" (Philippians 4:8), beautifully encapsulates the essence of a virtuous life. Virtue, in the Catholic understanding, is defined as "an habitual and firm disposition to do the good" (CCC, 1803). It allows the person not merely to perform good actions but to strive for moral excellence, engaging the whole of their being—both sensory and spiritual—in the pursuit of what is good, and choosing it consistently in specific, concrete actions.

Virtue strengthens one's attitude and firmly disposes both the intellect and the will to control the passions, guiding conduct through reason enlightened by faith. This firm disposition not only brings moral clarity but also empowers the individual to resist temptation and align their life with the will of God.

Human virtues are acquired through education and are perfected by deliberate and repeated acts. These acts, inspired by Divine Grace, gradually form habits, leading the person toward greater moral maturity. As the Catechism explains, "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" (CCC, 1804). The moral virtues, therefore, enable a person to live in harmony with others and contribute to a just society.

In addition to these moral virtues, the theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity—are the foundation of Christian moral life. Unlike the moral virtues, the theological virtues are infused by God and orient the individual toward participation in the life of the Holy Trinity. They adapt our innate mental and physical abilities, directing them toward divine love and eternal communion with God. These virtues do not arise from human effort but are gifts from God, necessary for a life that is rooted in Christian faith and oriented toward salvation.

By cultivating both the moral and theological virtues, a Christian is equipped to navigate the complexities of life while growing in holiness, ever striving to conform their heart and will to the likeness of Christ.

### Theological Virtues

Theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity, infused by God into the soul at baptism, and they direct the believer toward God Himself. The three theological virtues are:

- **Faith** – This is the virtue by which we believe in God and all that He has revealed, and all that the Church proposes for belief. Faith is more than intellectual assent; it is a personal adherence to God and a trust in His promises. St. Paul emphasizes the importance of faith when he states, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6).
- **Hope** – This virtue involves trusting in God's promises, desiring eternal life, and placing confidence in the Holy Spirit's guidance and support. Hope sustains the believer amid trials and directs the heart toward heaven. It is, as St. Paul says, the anchor of the soul (Heb. 6:19).

- **Charity (Love)** – Charity is the greatest of the theological virtues (1 Cor. 13:13). It involves loving God above all things for His own sake and loving one's neighbor as oneself for the love of God. Charity perfects and animates all other virtues by directing them toward their ultimate purpose: union with God.

### **Moral Virtues**

The moral virtues, also known as the cardinal virtues, are the virtues upon which the moral life hinges. These are acquired through human effort and are habits that perfect the powers of the soul. The four primary moral virtues are:

- **Prudence** – This virtue allows us to discern the true good in every circumstance and choose the right means of achieving it. It is often called the "charioteer of the virtues" because it guides and orders all other virtues by reason (CCC, 1806). Prudence involves both practical wisdom and the ability to apply moral principles to specific situations.
- **Justice** – Justice refers to the constant and firm will to give what is due to God and neighbor. It involves fairness in human relationships and seeks the good of others, respecting their rights and duties. In Sacred Scripture, justice is praised as a central moral quality (Matthew 5:6 NABRE).
- **Fortitude** – Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the soul to endure trials and hardships, even to the point of martyrdom. St. Paul encourages the practice of fortitude when he speaks of putting on the "armor of God" to withstand the evil day (Ephesians 6:13 NABRE).
- **Temperance** – Temperance moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the mastery of the will over instinct and desires, keeping passions within the bounds of reason. Temperance helps cultivate self-control, especially in areas such as food, drink, and sexuality (CCC, 1809).

Together, the theological and moral virtues form the basis of Christian life, directing individuals toward both their natural good (happiness) and their supernatural end (union with God). Through the practice of these virtues, a person grows in holiness, becoming more fully conformed to the likeness of Christ.

Sources:

#### **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)**

- Virtue: CCC 1803-1804
- Moral Virtues: CCC 1804-1811
- Theological Virtues: CCC 1812-1829

**Sacred Scripture:** *Philippians 4:8*