



# THE HUMAN PERSON

## 8. The Theological Virtues

### Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

#### ***What are the theological virtues?***

The human virtues are rooted in the theological virtues, which adapt man's faculties for participation in the divine nature: for the theological virtues relate directly to God. They dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive and object. (1812)

The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity. (Cf. 1 Cor 13:13) (1813)

### FAITH

#### ***What is faith?***

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith "man freely commits his entire self to God" (Vatican II) For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God's will. "The righteous shall live by faith." Living faith "works through charity". (Rom 1:17; Gal 5:6) (1814)

The gift of faith remains in one who has not sinned against it. But "faith apart from works is dead" (Jas 2:26) when it is deprived of hope and love, faith does not fully unite the believer to Christ and does not make him a living member of his Body. (1815)

#### ***Professing faith***

The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it and spread it: "All however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks" (Vatican II). Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation: "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32-33). (1816)

### HOPE

#### ***What is hope?***

Hope is the theological virtue 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. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb 10:23) "The Holy Spirit... he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:6-7) (1817)

#### ***Sustains the aspiration to happiness in the human heart***

The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity. (1818)

#### ***The witness of Abraham***

Christian hope takes up and fulfils the hope of the chosen people which has its origin and model in the *hope of Abraham*, who was blessed abundantly by the promises of God fulfilled in Isaac, and who was purified by the test of the sacrifice. "Hoping against hope, he believed, and thus became the father of many nations" (Rom 4:18). (1819)

#### ***Focused on Christ***

Christian hope unfolds from the beginning of Jesus' preaching in the proclamation of the beatitudes. The *Beatitudes* raise our hope toward heaven as the new Promised Land; they trace the path that leads through the trials that await the disciples of Jesus. But through the merits of Jesus Christ and of his Passion, God keeps us in the "hope that does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5) Hope is the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul... that enters... where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb 6:19-20) Hope is also a weapon that protects us in the struggle of salvation: "Let us... put on the breastplate of faith and charity, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Th 5:8) It affords us joy even under trial: "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation" (Rom 12:12) Hope is expressed and nourished in prayer, especially in the Our Father, the summary of everything that hope leads us to desire. (1820)

#### ***The promise of the glory of heaven***

We can therefore hope in the glory of heaven promised by God to those who love him and do his will. In every circumstance, each one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to persevere "to the end" (Mt 10:22) and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God's eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ. In hope, the Church prays for "all men to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4) She longs to be united with Christ, her Bridegroom, in the glory of heaven:

"Hope, O my soul, hope. You know neither the day nor the hour. Watch carefully, for everything passes quickly, even though your impatience makes doubtful what is certain, and turns a very short time into a long one. Dream that the more you struggle, the more you prove the love that you bear your God, and the more you will rejoice one day with your Beloved, in a happiness and rapture that can never end." (St. Teresa of Avila) (1821)

## CHARITY

### *What is charity?*

Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God. (1822)

### *A new commandment*

Jesus makes charity *the new commandment*. (Cf Jn 13:34) By loving his own “to the end” (Jn 13:1), he makes manifest the Father's love which he receives. By loving one another, the disciples imitate the love of Jesus which they themselves receive. Whence Jesus says: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love”. And again: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (Jn 15:9, 12) (1823)

### *Keeping the commandments*

Fruit of the Spirit and fullness of the Law, charity keeps the *commandments* of God and his Christ: “Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” (Jn 15:9-10) (1824)

### *The command to love our enemies*

Christ died out of love for us, while we were still “enemies” (Rom 5:10) The Lord asks us to love as he does, even our enemies, to make ourselves the neighbour of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself. (Cf. Mt 5:44; Lk 10:27-37; Mk 9:37; Mt 25:40, 45) (1825)

The Apostle Paul has given an incomparable depiction of charity: “Charity is patient and kind, charity is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right.

Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:4-7)

“If I... have not charity”, says the Apostle, “I am nothing”. Whatever my privilege, service, or even virtue, “if I... have not charity, I gain nothing”. (1 Cor 13:1-4) Charity is superior to all the virtues. It is the first of the theological virtues: “So faith, hope, charity abide, these three. But *the greatest of these is charity*.” (1 Cor 13:13) (1826)

### *Charity is the ‘form of the virtues’*

The practice of all the virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14); it is the form of the virtues ; it articulates and orders them among themselves; it is the source and the goal of their Christian practice. Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love and raises it to the supernatural perfection of divine love. (1827)

The practice of the moral life animated by charity gives to the Christian the spiritual freedom of the children of God. He no longer stands before God as a slave, in servile fear, or as a mercenary looking for wages, but as a son responding to the love of him who “first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19):

“If we turn away from evil out of fear of punishment, we are in the position of slaves. If we pursue the enticement of wages, we resemble mercenaries. Finally, if we obey for the sake of the good itself and out of love for him who commands... we are in the position of children.” (St. Basil). (1828)

### *The fruits of charity*

The *fruits* of charity are joy, peace and mercy; charity demands beneficence and fraternal correction; it is benevolence; it fosters reciprocity and remains disinterested and generous; it is friendship and communion:

“Love is itself the fulfilment of all our works. There is the goal; that it is why we run: we run toward it, and once we reach it, in it we shall find rest.” (St. Augustine) (1829)

## THE GIFTS AND FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. (1830)

### *The seven gifts*

The seven *gifts* of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. (Cf. Is 11:1-2) They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.

Let your good spirit lead me on a level path. (Ps 143:10)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God... If children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. (Rom 8:14, 17) (1831)

### *The twelve fruits*

The *fruits* of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity” (Gal 5:22-23). (1832)

## IN BRIEF

- **The theological virtues dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have God for their origin, their motive and their object - God known by faith, God hoped in and loved for his own sake. (1840)**
- **There are three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity. They inform all the moral virtues and give life to them. (1841)**
- **By faith, we believe in God and believe all that he has revealed to us and that Holy Church proposes for our belief. (1842)**
- **By hope we desire, and with steadfast trust await from God, eternal life and the graces to merit it. (1843)**
- **By charity, we love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves for love of God. Charity, the form of all the virtues, “binds everything together in perfect harmony”. (Col 3:14) (1844)**
- **The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon Christians are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. (1845)**