

LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD E. MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

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BEGINNING A NEW SERIES OF REFLECTIONS

With this issue of *Light and Life* we will begin a study of the virtues by which we grow in our resemblance to Our Maker. We shall consider the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, as well as the Moral Virtues – Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance. This issue of *Light and Life* will consider the general nature of virtue, and God’s call to embrace virtue as the foundation of our lives in Christ.

Each year, the July – August issue of *Light and Life* celebrates the Assumption of Mary; this year will be no different, and the Rosary Center will offer two novenas of Masses for its friends, their families, and their special intentions. We hope that the reflections on the virtues – especially as we celebrate Mary’s Assumption – will deepen our awareness of Mary as the exemplar of all virtue, and that we will more deeply appreciate her Assumption as a sign of the glory God calls each of us to share.

In 1950, to celebrate the proclamation of the doctrine of the Assumption, Pope Pius XII prepared an Apostolic Constitution, a letter to the Church throughout the world, in which he said that the age-old sermons on the Assumption, as well as the other writings of the Church Fathers,

...rest on Scripture as their ultimate foundation. Scripture portrays the loving Mother of God, almost before our very eyes, as most intimately united with her divine Son and always sharing in His destiny.

The word “destiny” is filled with noble promise. The dictionary defines destiny as “*the power...that determines the course of events.*” The pagan Romans personified Destiny as a goddess, but Christians understand God’s love as the power that makes things happen. As we celebrate the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, let us ponder – and rejoice in – the glorious destiny our Baptism calls us to share with the Mother of God.



The Assumption of Mary

A PILGRIM IN ROME

*Fr. Reginald Reflects on
The Jubilee of St. Paul*

Last year I was privileged to accompany members of the Order of Malta to Lourdes, where – on the 150th anniversary of the Blessed Mother’s apparition – I visited the sites associated with St. Bernadette. Like everyone who made that pilgrimage, I came home renewed in my love for the Virgin Mary, God’s vessel chosen to be a special sign of His love, and a model for all His children.

When Confraternity members and their friends receive this issue of *Light and Life*, I will have just returned from another pilgrimage, this time to Rome, to celebrate the Jubilee that honors the 2,000th anniversary of St. Paul’s birth. Once again, I will travel with a member

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2 Novenas of Masses

in honor of

The Assumption of Mary

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TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

VIRTUE, AN INTRODUCTION

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

Before we consider individual virtues, we must consider the nature of virtue itself. Each of us has been trained to call certain acts “virtuous,” so we understand instinctively what virtue is, and – if asked – could reply truthfully that virtue is a good habit.

This is a good answer, and we need not try to improve upon it. No amount of study will change it. However, if we delve a little deeper, we can discover that our good acts are built upon a rich and beautiful theological foundation. Understanding what lies behind our good acts gives us additional reason for striving to perform more, and better, acts, as well as additional reason to love God, who is the source of all goodness.

St. Thomas Aquinas, reflecting St. Augustine, calls virtue

A good habit of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us.... (ST I-II, 55.4)

We shall consider each of these elements in turn.

A GOOD HABIT

The word “habit” comes from the Latin word *habere*, which means “to have.” Our theology teaches us that habits are dispositions, tendencies within us by which we are moved to act. God has given us the freedom to choose from among many options; when we consistently use our freedom to choose good, we find good easier and easier to choose, and good actions easier and easier to perform.

As we cultivate this disposition to choose good, it becomes more and more a part of who we are. Habit comes from the word that means “to have,” so when we speak of habits, we describe something a person “has,” namely, a disposition to act in a certain way.

A HABIT OF THE MIND

Our bodies act either from nature or from some impulse of the soul. Although an act such as breathing *appears* to be habitual, because we do it continually, our bodies have no power over the act of breathing. Freedom and choice are essential components in habits, so habits are qualities of our mind or soul – the part of us that makes choices and commands our bodies to perform particular acts in particular ways.

A RIGHTEOUS LIFE

The relation of virtue to living righteously should be self-evident. If we describe bad habits, the dispositions

that impel us to perform the evil acts we call sin, we are not speaking of the dispositions that encourage us to do good. St. Paul teaches

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Phil. 4:8).

The qualities St. Paul enumerates are the choices we refer to when we speak of the habit of living righteously.

NO BAD USE

Once again, our definition confronts us with the self-evident. If virtues are the habitual choices by which we live righteously, they cannot be directed toward evil.

GOD AT WORK IN US

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes St. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the early Church Fathers (A.D. 335 – 395), “*The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.*” God works in our lives in various ways. He can enable us to perform some heroic act for which we are altogether unprepared, and for which we have no natural aptitude. We call this *infused* virtue, and we will discuss it more thoroughly when we consider the theological virtues.

In our everyday lives, God’s activity is far more subtle, prompting us to choose the good which lies before us, and to reject what will lead us to sin. St. Thomas observes, “*...He works in every will and in every creature*” (ST I-II, 55, ad 6). These words describe the immensity of God’s desire for our good, but they also describe our awesome responsibility in relation to God. When we say, “God works in every will,” we acknowledge not only God’s power in our lives, but the power of our human freedom to cooperate with God, or to thwart Him.

God can work in our lives without any action on our part, as when He inspires martyrs to face threats far beyond normal human courage. However, God does nothing in our lives without our consent. God’s will does not replace our will; it perfects our aptitude and power to do good.

VIRTUE AND FREEDOM

The *Catechism* teaches, “*The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good*” (1804). God’s Word, revealed through the Scripture and the authority of the Church,

provides direction for our actions. When we exercise our freedom to act according to God's Word, we not only choose to do a good deed, we discover what is most God-like – that is, what is the best – in ourselves.

VIRTUE AND PRAYER

Prayer enables us to embrace the truth of God's Word and, thus, to "have" it – as an habitual part of our interior life. Prayer is one of the ways by which we form our conscience and learn to make the choices that will manifest God's will and make His love visible to our world.

VIRTUE AND PRACTICE

Anyone who has mastered a complex skill understands the virtue of practice. Whether we strive to excel in a physical sport, learn a foreign language, or play a musical instrument, our success increases in direct relation to the time we devote to repeating the same tasks over and over. Once a skill becomes habitual we call it "second nature." This term describes the ease with which we do something, and the grace with which we act. We may devote years to developing the ability to swim well, or to perfecting a golf stroke, but once we master the skill, we no longer have to think about its component parts, we simply "do" it.

The same is true of our lives of virtue. The *Catechism* teaches "A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good" (1803). It continues

Human virtues are firm attitudes...perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith (1804).

These dispositions do not become either habitual or firm overnight; they are something we achieve by performing virtuous acts repeatedly. These acts may be as obvious as contributing to a favorite charity, or as subtle as "letting go" of a grudge, but if they are to become a part of our personal treasury, we must pursue them regularly.

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

When speaking of virtues, the *Catechism* remarks, "They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life" (1804). The appearance of joy in this list is significant. Our theology teaches that joy is the satisfaction that comes from possessing some good thing or from doing some good deed.

Joy is often linked with peace, which is a state of tranquility, in which the soul simply rests.

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine cries out to God, "our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee." Augustine is obviously speaking of the everlasting life – and eternal rest – we look forward to sharing with God in heaven. However, we must not overlook the application of these words to the here-and-now reality

of our everyday existence. Common sense and human experience tell us that the peace and joy of God's kingdom may prove to be very elusive goals in our daily lives, but a life of virtue is nonetheless a sign, however imperfect, of God's kingdom. Joy and peace most definitely have social – even global – consequences, but they begin as our very personal awareness of having acted well.

VIRTUE AND TRUTH

Truth is the correspondence between some created thing and the image of that thing in the mind of its creator. Our faith tells us we are created in God's image and likeness. This means that our actions bear witness to the truth of God's image in us. At least they should. A life of virtue reveals more and more clearly – more and more *truly* – God's image in us. We earlier quoted St. Gregory of Nyssa, who said "*The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.*" This is not an invitation to pride; even the greatest saints do not approach God's infinite goodness. Nevertheless, our efforts to live virtuously enable each of us to be for the Church – and for one another – the same source of inspiration that God is.

VIRTUE AND THE VIRGIN MARY

No one who has read *Light and Life* for any time at all will be surprised if we introduce God's Mother as the supreme example of a virtuous human life. To say this in no way diminishes the honor due Mary's Son, our Lord. However, Mary, like us, one of God's creatures, faced the challenge of showing the world the true image of God.

We earlier observed that God may occasionally work in our lives without any deliberate action on our part. However, God does not act without our consent. Our first encounter with Mary in the gospel shows us the example of her consent, which gives flesh and blood, a human face and human hands, to God's Word. Whenever we find her in the gospel account her actions demonstrate this same, fruitful consent.

Obviously, this consent could not have been always easy to give. A look at the choices God asks us to consent to tells us that Mary's consent must sometimes have been a wrenching experience. Who of us can face the death of someone we love without regret? The many artistic representations of Mary at the foot of the cross – our Sorrowful Mother – show the grief and anguish that were the price of her consent. But at the same time, these images depict Mary surrounded with the quiet and calm that are the characteristics of peace. Hard as her choices were – hard as ours are – Mary shows us the peace that crowns a life of virtue.

Mary shows us, too, that true joy is something different from the exhilarating happiness we may feel in the face of some pleasant event. Such feelings, however delightful, are a small part of the theological joy that rewards a life of virtue. The Old Testament

figure of Job shows us the fragility and impermanence of many of the things that delight our senses. True joy is the satisfaction of having done some good deed, or possessing some good thing. It lasts far beyond the intoxication of passion or the thrill of a well-deserved victory. If theological joy pales in comparison to the feelings we experience in the presence of loved ones, or in the face of some good fortune, it is, perhaps, because true joy – the reward of virtue – is not subject to the peaks and valleys of our emotional lives.

The Litany of Loreto addresses Mary as, “Cause of our joy” and “Queen of peace.” If we consider that virtue is, as St. Augustine and St. Thomas teach, “*a good habit of the mind by which we live righteously,*” we may begin to understand a new richness to these titles we attribute to Mary.

Mary is cause of our joy, of course, because she gave us her Divine Son, who promises

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete (John 15:10)

Jesus’ words are nothing less than an invitation to a life of virtue, lived according to His commandments and example. His promise of joy that is complete, *i.e.*, full, unthreatened, everlasting, is at once a challenge and a promise. A challenge to be *alter Christus* – another Christ – for the world. And a promise that the God who is careful enough to keep track of sparrows will not fail to applaud our efforts to show His love to the world. ■

PILGRIMAGE IN ROME *Continued from page 1*

of the Order of Malta, and we plan to visit each of the churches designated a pilgrimage site.

The opportunity to travel is a great gift, and the opportunity to travel to Rome is a special honor. I am profoundly grateful to the friend who has made this trip possible, and this gratitude calls to mind an axiom of our faith – that God’s gifts are never given simply to enrich the one who receives them; they are given to be shared with the whole Church. I will keep you, and your intentions in my prayers, so that all who support the Rosary Confraternity may share the blessings of this pilgrimage.

The modern pilgrimage owes its popularity to St. Philip Neri, who promoted it in the 16th Century. We will begin with Mass at St. Peter’s, then make our way to St. Mary Major, the oldest church in the West dedicated to the Mother of God. We will walk to the Church of St. Lawrence, described as “*outside the walls*” for its location in what was, in earlier times, somewhat remote. The next church we will visit is that of the Holy Cross, built over the home of St. Helena, mother of the first Christian emperor. Helena’s piety led her to Jerusalem, where tradition says she located the cross

on which Our Savior offered His life. Helena’s church houses what are believed to be the nails of crucifixion, remnants of the Crown of Thorns, and the inscription that identified Jesus as King of the Jews. Our next stop will be St. John Lateran, the cathedral for the city of Rome.

The last two churches on our pilgrimage are approached along the ancient Appian Way, which will take us past catacombs and other sites associated with the early days of our faith – including the spot where St. Peter, fleeing persecution, met the Risen Jesus, walking toward the city. “*Domine, quo vadis?*” he asked, “*Lord, where are you going?*” “*Back to suffer again,*” came the reply, at which Peter returned to complete his heroic struggles.

We will visit the Church of St. Sebastian, a Roman soldier executed for his faith. From there we will conclude our pilgrimage at the Church of St. Paul – once again designated “*outside the walls.*” Because St. Paul was a Roman citizen he could not be executed by crucifixion. Ancient tradition says he was beheaded on what is now the site of the church bearing his name. Excavations for this Jubilee Year will allow us to see not only the saint’s tomb, but some remains of the original church erected over it.

I cannot count the times I remembered the Rosary Center’s friends last year at Lourdes; I expect to be equally mindful of you in Rome. You allow us to touch innumerable souls throughout the world who long to hear the Good News contained in Our Lady’s Rosary. In return, I promise to remember you in the prayers I will offer in Rome.

I am writing these words on Pentecost, the great birthday feast of the Church. In a few moments I will celebrate Mass, and the readings and music will describe God’s outpouring of His Spirit on the disciples and Mary. Tongues of fire gave each the courage to preach, and God’s love enabled everyone – regardless of their native tongue – to understand.

This image of the disciples’ growth in courage illustrates what I mentioned a moment ago – that we cannot keep God’s gifts to ourselves; we must share them, so others can experience God’s love. Your support of our ministry makes every day a Pentecost at the Rosary Center, and your prayerful support is the means by which we are able to bring the gospel to individuals – quite literally – of every race and nation and tongue under heaven.

With grateful prayers,

Fr. Reginald Martin, O.P.

