

Virtues: Gospel proclaimed through good works

“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” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1803, quoting Phil 4:8).

“Patience is a virtue, Sharon!” This familiar phrase was one of my grandmother’s favorites. My grandmother and my mother were the first evangelizers in my life. As models of faithfulness, they introduced me to Jesus Christ and guided me along my first steps of Christian discipleship. I believed in Jesus, because they believed.

As a child I did not understand well what either “patience” or “virtue” meant. (My mother would still say that I need a bit of work in the virtue of patience!) But, the Catechism of the Catholic Church helps us understand the meaning of both. It says that a “virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself or herself” (CCC, 1803).

Good acts do not always come easily, and to “give the best of oneself” over freely to the love of God and his plan for us in Christ Jesus requires constant effort and work. A big step in living a life of virtue is committing oneself to the Christian disciplines of prayer, discernment, studying of God’s word, acts of charity, and participation in the sacraments, especially the Sunday Eucharist.

These disciplines of Christian life are the “tools and skills” for navigating the challenges of daily life and help each of us translate our faith into concrete strategies for making our world a better place. We are all called to be persons of virtue who allow the sheer power of the Gospel to be proclaimed through our positive attitudes, dispositions and good works.

At the heart of our good works is the Holy Spirit offering us, through the church, the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of virtue. The Holy Spirit helps us to rely

less on our own strength and more on the strength of God. The Holy Spirit vivifies and enlightens the mind to distinguish altruism from selfishness, good from evil and manipulation from loving activity.

Faith, hope and love are the theological virtues that undergird all of our good works. Faith is the theological virtue by which we are capable of believing in God and all that he has revealed to us through Christ as witnessed by his church (cf. CCC, 1822).

Hope is the virtue by which we desire the kingdom of God and eternal life, and place trust in Christ's promise of salvation amid a world that often veils his power and presence. Love animates and inspires all the other virtues and is the first rule of Christian life.

The Catechism tells us that "everyone should ask for this grace of light and strength, frequent the sacraments, cooperate with the Holy Spirit to follow what is good and shun what is evil" (CCC, 1812-1813). In other words, be patient with ourselves and one another, and be ready to respond to the activity of God's immeasurable grace and love that makes us capable of living virtuous lives.

Let us think about the things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent and worthy of praise – so that, others may know us by our good works and give glory to the Father through Christ Jesus the Lord.

Faith sharing questions for further consideration:

- How do you cooperate with the Holy Spirit by proclaiming the Gospel through your attitudes, disposition and good works?
- How do the theological virtues of faith, hope and love provide the foundation for your daily life?

Sharon A. Bogusz is the coordinator for evangelization and adult catechesis for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. This is the fourth in a series of articles about the six-week fall session of Why Catholic?