



Carrying the light of Christ, May 7: Living virtuously in a time of pandemic

May 6, 2020 | [Bishop Lucia](#)

These days I have been thinking about the meaning of the word “virtue.” In common parlance, according to the online *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, it signifies:

1 a: conformity to a standard of right : morality

b: a particular moral excellence

2 a beneficial quality or power of a thing

3 manly strength or courage : valor

4 a commendable quality or trait : merit

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) in #1803 also defines “virtue” in this manner:

“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). 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. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions. ‘The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God’ (St. Gregory of Nyssa).”

I share these definitions because I have been concerned by letters I have seen in the public forum — and some sent to me — that have been less than filled with virtue, even if meant to be well-intended. As the First Letter of John states, “Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth” (3:18).

I realize that some of the anger comes out of frustration at not knowing when we are going to get back to “normal.” It is true we are tired of staying at home and of being isolated socially. People’s livelihoods are threatened by being out of work. We may even think that God is mad at us and wonder what we have to do for God to love us again. Some fear that the Catholic Church and her leaders are capitulating to the civil authorities and lacking faith. All of this is personified and even villainized in the inability to receive the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. I say such ideas are absolutely not so. If anything, the leaders of the Catholic Church in the U.S. are inviting her members to more virtuous living.

What is not understood is that our present inability is not a punishment or an abuse of authority or a dearth of faith. Rather, the occasion speaks to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity and our own embracing of them. These three virtues dispose us to live in right relationship with God and they inform our moral (human) virtues; that is, the practical way that you and I love God and neighbor every day (see CCC, 1840 and 1841).

“Virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do good” (CCC, 1833). Bishops have been using the moral (human) virtues to help promote the common good and safety of all people at this time. Sadly, some individuals have the idea that this pandemic is over-dramatized or infringing on their rights. I am sorry, but today’s headlines that this country alone expects 100,000 deaths from COVID-19 demand our attention and our action. Although we shouldn’t live in fear and we cannot stay behind locked doors forever, you and I need to

recognize that the two Great Commandments that direct how we obtain eternal life (see Mt 16:19-22) speak not only about loving God but loving our neighbor as **ourselves**.

This is where the human virtues enter. Again, referencing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Church's magisterium teaches that:

- The human virtues are stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that govern our acts, order our passions, and guide our conduct in accordance with reason and faith. They can be grouped around the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance (1834).
- Prudence disposes the practical reason to discern, in every circumstance, our true good and to choose the right means for achieving it (1835).
- Justice consists in the firm and constant will to give God and neighbor their due (1836).
- Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good (1837).
- Temperance moderates the attraction of the pleasures of the senses and provides balance in the use of created goods (1838).
- The moral virtues grow through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle. Divine grace purifies and elevates them (1839).

It is to such Divine grace and intervention that I and the leaders of the Catholic Church in the United States have turned again and again. That is why on May 1, the Catholic bishops of this country were provided with guidelines of nearly 45 pages for the re-establishing of sacramental life in terms of the pandemic.

You might be surprised that the first option was offering Mass in our churches again **without** the distribution of Holy Communion. It stated: "Since being present and actively participating in Mass is a great good for the faithful, and since it is not strictly necessary that any particular members of the faithful receive Holy Communion at Mass, Mass could be celebrated in which only the priest (and deacon) consume the Eucharist. ... Obviously, it is preferable that the faithful would receive Holy Communion, but at least in this case they would be able to attend Mass in person." I know this boggles most of our minds, but for me it illustrates what I have been saying to you about "virtue" and what our focus should be even in these days: our relationship with the community of the Most Holy Trinity (God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and how the good of that relationship should translate to the human community in which you and I live.

Please know that my prayers continue for our local Church as we continue to struggle with the deadly effects of the coronavirus and know that my collaborators and I are diligently working so that our churches may reopen soon. However, please be patient even when they open — things are going to be different there, as they will be in other public places. I ask you to respect the rules that will be set in place because it is just another way of respecting and loving our neighbor ... and it is then that we truly give God all glory, honor, and praise! God bless you!