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FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

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SOME THOUGHTS FOR LENT

Fr. Reginald Martin, O.P.

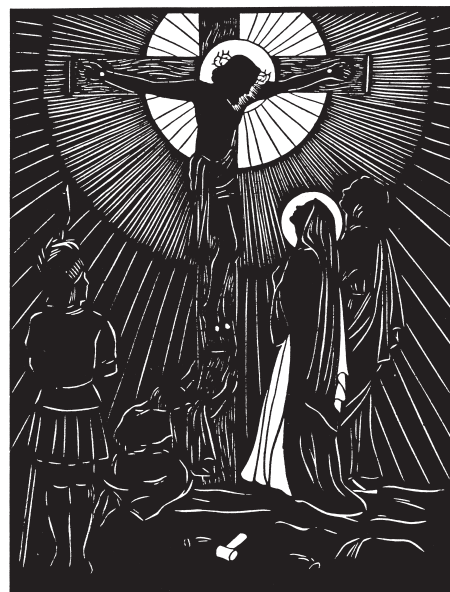
The other day someone asked me why Ash Wednesday isn't a holy day of obligation. I confess I was taken aback – first, because I had never considered the question and, secondly, because I had no ready answer. Obviously, the time had come for a little study, so I turned (as I always do) to our Catechism, which offered some very valuable insight on the nature of holydays.

The text remarks that the Church honors certain days by giving them the same character as Sunday. This includes the obligation to attend Mass, of course, but also encourages "...the faithful...to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder...the joy proper to the Lord's Day..." (CCC, # 2185) This reflects legislation in the Church's Code of Canon Law, which states, "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound...to abstain from those labors and business concerns which impede the worship to be rendered to God, the joy...proper to the Lord's Day, or the proper relaxation of mind and body." (CIC, #1247)

These remarks suggest two reasons for not considering Ash Wednesday a holy day of obligation. The first is the practical difficulty, for most individuals, to enjoy any sense of leisure on the day. The second is the penitential – rather than joyful – character of the day. To attend Mass on Ash Wednesday is altogether appropriate, as this allow us to acknowledge our common sinfulness. However, to engage in activities that should characterize our day of Sabbath rest is not.

Ash Wednesday will be over by the time our readers receive this copy of Light & Life, but the Lenten season will continue to unfold – and invite us deeper and deeper into the Mystery of Our Savior's life, until we find ourselves with him in the Upper Room on Holy Thursday and witnessing his passion and death on Good Friday.

We can be mere spectators at these events, of course, but that is to miss the point of them. One of the Church's early writers said that Jesus took on our flesh and went through every moment of our lives, even the last. Not so that we wouldn't have to, but to show us how, and to teach us how to do it right. Lent invites us to join Jesus



Silhouette by Sr. Jean Dorcy, O.P.

– to unite ourselves with Him – on a life-transforming pilgrimage that leads from death to life.

Participating at Mass, meditating on the Gospel, and praying the Rosary are among the principle ways we can make the journey from Lent to Easter. And for those who wish to immerse themselves still deeper in the mystery of our redemption, the Rosary Center offers a new CD by Fr. Brian Mullady, *Conscience: Preparing for Lent*.

NEW FROM THE ROSARY CENTER

Fr. Brian Mullady has also prepared a new series of lectures, *Philosophy for Theologians*. This is a CD presentation of a 14-week course he offers to students at Holy Apostles Seminary. Those interested in philosophy from a Catholic perspective will find the material fascinating.

Walking with St. Dominic explores and compares Jesus' contemplative union with the Father to St. Dominic's life of intense prayer, which yields "fruits of contemplation," to be shared with others.

Fr. Andrew Apostoli's *Fatima for Today* provides new insight into the words of Our Lady. Pope Benedict XVI

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit: IV Fortitude

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

A SHARED NAME

The third of the Spirit's gifts that enriches the will is the gift of Fortitude. This is, of course, a name shared with the moral virtue, so we might profitably spend a moment considering the virtue of Fortitude, to learn how the gift compliments yet differs from it.

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)

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 HELPFUL DISTINCTION

What sets Fortitude apart from the other virtues is the capacity it gives us to face hard tasks, and especially tasks that are dangerous. Fortitude strengthens our will to follow the good of reason despite our fear of bodily harm or hard work, and it places limits on our will when our will is moved to some rash action. St. Thomas Aquinas taught, "...*Fortitude is about...curbing fear and moderating daring*" (ST II-II, 123.3)

FORTITUDE'S TWO-FOLD TASK

This description needs to be understood carefully. We have all heard the term, "flight or fight." This is the arena in which Fortitude manifests itself. To lessen daring, Fortitude moderates the blind human tendency to fight. To curb fear, Fortitude encourages us to fight, if a stern reply is an appropriate response. We must always remember that virtues seek the mean between extremes. Fortitude, like all the virtues, is a habit of self-mastery. It particularly prods us to lay aside unreasonable fear, and directs us to rein in any temptation to unwise behavior through rash or hasty action.

In our everyday life, Fortitude manifests itself more often by assisting us to face our fears than by reducing our inclination to lash out blindly. This is because danger exercises its own dampening effect on our bravery. And because danger is more apt to incite fear (urging us to run

away) than to perform some act of foolhardy bravery, the virtue of Fortitude usually concerns itself with enabling us to withstand fear in the face of some perceived danger.

ACTIVE FORTITUDE

Theologians call this manifestation of the virtue of Fortitude "active" Fortitude, because it equips us to face – and overcome – a specific, identifiable obstacle with courage and strength of will. We need only think of the Church's martyrs, whose Fortitude often impressed even their persecutors.

But what of the individual who must endure a long, fatal illness? Or any of us who struggles with temptation? In these cases we are faced with forces that cannot be resisted, but must simply be endured. Here we may think of Jesus, confronted by the soldiers in the Garden, led helpless before Pilate, and, finally, nailed to the cross.

PASSIVE FORTITUDE

What strengthened Jesus in these trials was the gift of Fortitude, a "passive" Fortitude that perfects the virtue of Fortitude, enabling us to endure what cannot be changed, to subdue our passions, to resist temptation, and to embrace austerity. As with the gifts of Piety and Fear of the Lord that we have already considered, the gift of Fortitude adds a dimension of love that may be lacking in the mere exercise of the virtue. This is the noble element that enabled Our Savior to beg forgiveness for his executioners as they nailed him to the cross on Calvary.

If we examine the situations or conditions that call us to endurance, resistance of temptation, and moderation of our passions, we can see that many might easily call forth harsh anger or a dangerous relaxing of our moral standards. The virtue of Fortitude strengthens our will to face such events without shrinking from them. The gift of Fortitude helps us embrace, patiently and gracefully, the suffering that often accompanies such self-denial. One spiritual writer observes,

If there is one thing more than another that the saints themselves found nearest the realms of impossibility, it was, surely, that of keeping the body in subjection, not by stifling its natural wants, but by curbing its unruly whims. It cost them years of labor, many a sacrifice and many a drop of blood. And they were saints. What, then, might not be said of the work ordinary Catholics are called upon to perform in virtue of the their religion? What of inordinate love, vanity, anger, insubordination, avarice? (James F. Carroll, C.S.Sp., God The Holy Ghost, p. 115)

THE GIFT AND THE WAY TO PERFECTION

Christ is our example in everything we do, so the gift of Fortitude builds on the virtue and helps us imitate Christ's own patience and forbearance. At the beginning of this reflection we discussed the virtue of Fortitude as something we possess, namely, a disposition or habit of self-mastery. Although God works in and through us in the virtues, they are natural to us. The virtues require the supernatural assistance of the Spirit's gifts if they are to achieve their perfection. Another writer comments on the insufficiency of virtue to achieve the end we seek,

Our good will does not always meet the task. How well we experience this when, after the grace of enlightenment following a good confession or a retreat, we make some resolution demanding courage, seek God's help in prayer, and then set to work – and fail! It needed something more, an even more divine help.

*The Holy Spirit takes pity on our weakness; he will not leave us sole masters of the strength we have received from him, He will complete it by a gift. The gift of fortitude comes to help our virtue of fortitude. The gift is not founded upon that strength which is our permanent possession, which we use or refrain from using at will...the gift comes from the Holy Spirit, and when it is he who takes possession of us, we submit to his irresistible pressure, we are no longer subject to the risks and vacillation of our own personal government. (H.D. Gardeil, O.P., *The Holy Spirit in Christian Life*, p. 35)*

FORTITUDE REVEALS WHO WE ARE

Essentially, the Holy Spirit's gift of Fortitude is the gift of spiritual self-confidence. *"With this gift...we no longer act as the sole lords and masters of our lives, but as the instruments of the power of the Spirit."* (p. 37) This quote underlines those positive passive qualities the gift confers on us – something that might be hard to accept at first, as we are so used to the notion that we must roll up our sleeves and assume full responsibility for everything we do. One benefit of the gift of Fortitude is to relieve us of some of that overwhelming personal responsibility, for it

...is a divine power, a perfection of the will, enabling the faithful soul to follow the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, with full confidence in Him in the hour of temptation, with magnanimous steadfastness in difficulties and with patient endurance of sufferings, and all this to the term of life's journey, to the end of the road which leads to heaven. (Carroll, p. 114)

Lest this seem cowardly, or an excuse for shirking our responsibility, our author refers to St. Thomas Aquinas, who, he says,

...puts forth many reasons showing how much more strength is required for suffering or endurance than for action. To attack is to throw oneself into peril, but to support the shock is more noble, more difficult, more perfect. It is the strong who attack, the more feeble who endure. Again he who receives, receives the attack, he who suffers, feels the actual danger, whilst he who gives fight sees it only in the future.

Hence, it is commonly said, that the best army is not the one most ardent in combat, but the one most enduring in fatigue. (Carroll, p. 116)

DISCOVERING OUR INNER RESOLVE

However, these reflections on the gift of Fortitude should by no means be mistaken as justification for abdicating entirely – or even largely – our share of responsibility in the quest for our salvation. The gift is the Spirit's promise of assistance in our pilgrimage toward God's kingdom, and, hence, a source of hope. St. Thomas Aquinas writes

Yet furthermore man's mind is moved by the Holy Ghost, in order that he may attain the end of each work begun, and avoid whatever perils may threaten. This surpasses human nature: for sometimes it is not in a man's power to attain the end of his work, or to avoid evils or dangers, since these may happen to overwhelm him in death. But the Holy Ghost works this in man, by bringing him to everlasting life, which is the end of all good deeds, and the release from all perils. A certain confidence of this is infused into the mind by the Holy Ghost Who expels any fear of the contrary. (II-II, 139.1)

THE COURAGE TO LOOK AHEAD

One of the maxims of our faith teaches that the Church believes as it prays. This means that we can look at our prayer life and gain an accurate picture of our doctrinal life. These words of St. Thomas echo one of our prayers, which begs God to bring to a happy conclusion the good work He has begun in us. This assures us that the Spirit's gift of Fortitude enables us to look beyond even the threat of death, confident that we may look forward in the future to the crown promised all God's heroes, even if our present heroic undertakings are thwarted by misfortune or the interference of God's enemies.

THE WISDOM TO EVALUATE

Cardinal Manning, whom we quoted in our last reflection, writes that the first result of the gift of Fortitude is the ability to assess the spiritual challenges that await us. *"If we have not courage and strength to bruise them under our feet, they will in the end bruise us under their power. Our character is the result of this conflict."* (*Internal Mission of the Holy Ghost*, p. 206)

These words call to mind a host of gospel challenges, such as Jesus' encounter with the man who said, *"I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home."* Jesus said to him, *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* (Lk. 9:61)

They suggest, too, the consoling words to St. Paul, who can laugh at hardship and say with absolute confidence, *"I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me."* (Phil. 4:13)

Perhaps most of all, though, they call to mind Moses' words to our ancestors in the desert, *"I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before*

you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore, choose life....” (Deut. 30:19)

THE EXAMPLE OF MARY

The gift of Fortitude is the Spirit's promise that if we are willing to choose the life God sets before us, we may rely upon the assistance that strengthened the numberless heroes of our faith throughout history. Each of us has our favorites, and if we are willing to do even the most cursory research we shall easily discover what obstacles the gift of Fortitude enabled them to overcome.

We may, likewise, look at Mary, standing at the foot of the cross, and see in her silent grief, the acceptance of pain and sorrow that the gift of Fortitude, at least occasionally, strengthens us – or those we love – to embrace and endure. ■

THE SONG OF SONGS FOR CATHOLICS

Fr. James Thompson, O.P.

PART 7: Concise Commentary 1:3

Your name spoken is a spreading perfume – that is why the maidens love you. (1:3) The name of the lover is not given; it is kept purposely vague. She has no need to reveal it, since it is already known to her (and to the maidens), and it is certainly a name of good repute. At this literal level I do not take the name to be Solomon. Although this Song is attributed to him, when Solomon is mentioned directly it is not always complimentary, and seems to me to be held in contrast to her lover. Hearing her lover's name, though, increases her yearning. Her lover is loved by all the maidens, but for her the name holds special, more intimate, significance.

SENSUALITY OF THE SONG

Notice the sensual elements here: longing for direct kisses on the mouth, the most intimate type of kiss; comparison of his love with wine, and his name with spreading perfume. On the one hand romantic love brings something of an obsession with the object of that love. On the other hand, in the glow of love, the rest of the world is seen in a clearer focus, and the senses seem heightened. You can see that reflected throughout the Song of Songs in the lavish use of metaphors with plants, animals, smells and textures, sights and sounds. If this sort of heightened awareness can take place while separated lovers await their next tryst, consider why believers can be so zealous upon their conversion! They have fallen in love with God!

ALLEGORY ON THE NAME OF JESUS

On an allegorical note, some of the Fathers explain this passage by noting that among the Jews the Name of God was bottled up, as it were, only in use among the children of Israel – and in later times only by the high priest. But with the coming of Christ, the personal name for us, among all the nations, is Jesus. It spreads throughout the world as the Gospel is preached like the fragrance of a spilled ointment fills an entire room. To some of the Fathers this passage evokes the great hymn of Christ's incarnational humility and subsequent exaltation. Jesus *“emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness”* but the Father

*greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend...
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord* (Phil. 2:7, 9-11)

THE KING & SOLOMON

Bring me, O king, to your chambers. (1:4) As stated above, I do not see Solomon himself as a major character in the Song. So the “king” here is the beloved's lover, not King Solomon. It is a common figure of speech both in ancient love songs and in current middle-eastern cultures that the bride and bridegroom are referred to as the queen and king on their wedding day. The beloved is calling for her lover, her king, to bring her into his home for their nocturnal nuptials.

Early commentators did, however, generally take the king as referring to Solomon, and many focused on the riches that the bride would share in his royal chambers. An ancient Jewish Aramaic paraphrase (called a Targum) on the Song of Songs saw this as referring to the Lord leading Israel to Mt. Sinai where he gave them their great treasure, the Law. The Church Fathers have various ideas on what the treasures are that the King, Christ, bestows on his Bride. Some would say the Scriptures, others would say the atonement, or the Eucharist, or the wealth attained through contemplation. You might think that these stretch the meaning quite a bit. I would agree!

WHO'S THIS “WE”?

“With you we rejoice and exult, we extol your love.” The NAB indicates that this is said in the voice of the maidens (later to be identified as the “daughters of Jerusalem”), which makes sense of the switch to “we” here. Holy Matrimony is not simply a private affair, but a communal one. It is communal in the sense of being the basis of Christian society, the Church, as well as civil society in general. And certainly since a Christian marriage is also one of the seven sacraments of the Church, we all rejoice and exult at such a love that mirrors for us the great largesse of the Lamb of God who gave himself so completely for his Bride, the Church.

With this installment we have finished my concise commentary on the title and prologue of the Song of Songs (1:1-4). In the next installment we will begin examining the first poem in the Song, which runs from 1:5 to 2:7. ■

NEW FROM THE ROSARY CENTER *(cont. from page 1)*

has praised the book for its capacity to help us “savor” the mystery of God's love.

Those interested in concise answers to modern questions about the faith will enjoy Fr. Kenneth Ryan's volume, *Catholic Questions, Catholic Answers*. Fr. Ryan is a contributor to Catholic Digest, and he provides insightful reflections on many current topics.

Consult the enclosed form to order these and many other works that are sure to enrich your faith!