

“The virtue of Fortitude in the daily living of our Catholic Faith”

1. **It’s not easy being a follower of Christ today**, as I spoke about last weekend. **But what a noble thing it is!** Anything worth doing in life is going to be a challenge. *To be good at sports, a subject at school, at our profession and vocation, we have to put in the time and effort and work – even more so when it comes to our Faith and cooperating with the Holy Spirit in the life long journey of holiness.* We have to be willing to pay the price to be a faithful disciple of the Lord! If Jesus went through the Cross to the glory of the Resurrection, we must do the same. There is NO WAY AROUND THE CROSS! Not exactly a popular message in our “feel good” age. Look at the prophet Jeremiah, who was truly a prefigurement of Jesus in the Old Testament. All he was trying to do is to preach God’s message with integrity to the Israelites: *which is always the call to repent of one’s sins and to turn back to the Lord, to the Commandments, to faithfulness; instead of running after the false gods of worldly pleasure and self-will and trusting in worldly Powers.* So what do the Israelites do to him today? Thank him? NOPE! They throw him in a cistern full of mud and leave him there to die because they don’t want to hear the truth – he’s “demoralizing the people”. These rebellious Israelites love **“the way of the lie.”** In our time, if we strive to live our Catholic faith with integrity, some people will try to cast us into “the mud”: *mock us, try to beat us down, to get us to compromise our values, our Faith, our Catholic vision of life and love.* How do we respond to these real life challenges?
2. Jesus says today in the Gospel, that He has *“come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing.”* And *“do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you rather division.”* WHAT?! This flies in the fact of our common perception about Jesus that He is a peaceful guy! **Well, He is truly the “Prince of Peace”, but peace on God’s terms, not man’s!** Never forget that! *God’s peace is “the tranquility of order” as St. Augustine puts it, which means a sense of harmony that comes from being in union with God’s design, with His will, with His ways of holiness.* This is where the virtue of **fortitude/courage**

shows its importance; without fortitude we will cave into the worldly mentality and compromise our faith and morals to “keep the peace.” We can view this in a negative way as a burden or in a positive way as an opportunity to grow in holiness. You see this in so many of the big areas of life today in our now predominantly non-religious culture with: *family members who don’t say anything when their relatives are getting married outside of the Church, or stop going to Mass or Confession regularly, **or they do speak up**; Catholics who don’t take a stand when their boss tries to get them to work the weekends and have to miss Mass as a result **or they do speak up**; married people who do not take a stand with their spouse who insists they practice contraception or get sterilized even though they know it is seriously wrong and against the Lord’s vision of marriage **or they do speak up**; People working in the medical field who do not stand up for the sanctity of human life at all stages and point out that abortion and euthanasia are grave evils **or they do speak up and act for Life**, or pharmacists who give out abortifacients and contraceptives **or they refuse to do so out of ultimate charity for souls**; People in the entertainment industry who don’t take a stand against the moral and spiritual denigration of the people portrayed in “art”, be it in music or movies or in television and social media **or they do take a stand**; Catholic politicians who go along with legislation that attacks the sanctity of life and marriage **or they refuse to do so** ; Catholics in the workplace who overlook serious ethical violations and cheating and stealing from others **or they witness to holiness by not participating in unethical business behavior.** And we could go on and on with examples; **sometimes we are called to speak up overtly against the evils of our time, other times it is a silent witness to the truth. The bottom line is:** all these examples show a lack, not necessarily of the gift of Faith, but rather, often times, of the virtue of fortitude/courage: which enables us to stand up for the Catholic Faith and any moral goodness when it is under attack: in general, or in relation to us personally.*

3. **There are many challenges to our Faith today!** But this is no reason to lose heart because the Holy Spirit is here to help us! He wants to bestow on us the gift

of fortitude in abundance, if only we open our hearts to Him. The **gift of fortitude** is given to us in our **Baptism** and bestowed on us in a greater way in the Sacrament of **Confirmation**, so as to enable us to be holy adult witnesses to Christ/Catholic Faith. How our witness is needed today, in a world awash in selfishness, materialism, secularism and lack of respect for true love and the gift of human life. As Pope St. John Paul II put it so beautifully, *we must witness to others the gift of our Catholic faith, in total integrity, as they have the right as human beings - also made in God's image - to hear the fullness of the truth of God's love.* May all of us be about this noble task of witnessing (giving testimony), rooted in faith and fortitude, in our family life, in our workplace, in our neighborhoods, with our friends, at school, in everything we do, for truly the salvation of our souls and the souls of those around us depends on it. And to confess daily in our nightly Act of Contrition and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly when we fail to do so in our weakness. And to remember what we hear in the letter to the Hebrews today, *“Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the Cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. **Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.** In your struggle against sin you have not resisted to the point of shedding blood. (Heb 12: 1-4). Truly the embracing of the spiritual battle of this life - the Cross- will lead someday to the Resurrection- Heaven. It's all worth it! God bless you.*

Recommended reading: Read a book about a Catholic martyr(s). We have many good ones in our Parish Library. In Church history - they, the martyrs, show us the virtue of Fortitude in its heroic manifestation, which we are all called to even if we don't die as a “**red martyr**” - all of us are called to the “**white**” **martyrdom** of dying to self on a daily basis in a spirit of reparation, for the good of the Church and the salvation of human souls in union with Jesus under the spiritual mantle of our Blessed Mother Mary.