

CHAPTER XI

The Virtue of Fortitude which Most Holy Mary Had.

568. The virtue of *fortitude*, which is the third of the four cardinal virtues, serves to moderate the personal activity of each one's irascible passions. Though it is true the concupiscible passions precede the irascible, and thus temperance, which regulates concupiscence, might seem to precede fortitude, because the irascible rises up to repel whatever impedes the cravings of the concupiscible, nevertheless we must first consider the irascible passions and their ruling virtue, which is fortitude; for in the pursuit of that which is desired success ordinarily depends upon the intervention of the irascible faculties for overcoming the obstacles which present themselves. Therefore fortitude is a more noble and excellent virtue than temperance, of which we shall treat in the following chapter.

569. The moderation of the irascible passions by the virtue of fortitude is made up of two elements or kinds of activity: To give way to anger in conformity with reason, propriety and honor, and to repress unreasonable anger and passion whenever it is more useful to restrain than to allow them to act, for as well the one as the other can be praiseworthy or blamable according to the end in view and the circumstances of the affair at hand. The first of these two kinds of operations of this virtue is properly called fortitude, which some Doctors call *aggression*. The second is called *patience*, which is the more noble and excellent kind of fortitude and is possessed and exercised principally by the saints. The worldly-minded, throwing aside good judgment and usurping a false term, are apt to call patience cowardliness, and misname inconsiderate and rash presumption fortitude; hence it happens that they never attain the true practice of the virtue of fortitude.

570. Most holy Mary had no disordered movements to be suppressed in the irascible passions by the virtue of fortitude, for in the most innocent Queen all the passions were well ordered and subordinated to reason, and her reason was subject to God, who governed Her in all her actions and movements. Yet She had need of this virtue in order to overcome the obstacles which the demon by diverse means placed in her way, seeking to prevent Her from attaining what She most prudently and most properly desired for Herself and her most holy Son. And in this most valiant resistance and conflict none of the creatures ever showed more fortitude, for no one ever encountered such conflicts and opposition as She did from the demon. But whenever it became necessary to make use of this kind of fortitude or *aggression* with human creatures, She was equally sweet and forcible, or rather, She was just as irresistible as She was most sweet in her activity, for this heavenly Lady alone among all creatures was able to copy so faithfully in her operations that attribute of the Most High which unites irresistible power with heavenly sweetness (Wis. 8:1). Thus our Queen proceeded in her actions with fortitude, knowing no disorderly fear in her generous Heart since She was superior to all creation. Neither was She rash, or audacious, or immoderate, being likewise removed from all these vicious extremes, for in her great wisdom She knew what terrors were to be vanquished and what rashness was to be avoided. Thus She was the chosen Woman, clothed in the strength of fortitude and beauty (Prov. 31:25).

571. That part of fortitude which consists in *patience* most holy Mary practiced in a still more admirable manner, for She alone participated in the excellence of the patience of her most holy Son, who bore punishment and suffered innocently without guilt, and in a greater measure than all those who had contracted the guilt. The whole life of the sovereign Queen was a continual

suffering and tribulation, especially during the life and death of our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Her patience during this time exceeds the comprehension of all creatures, and only the Lord who imposed this suffering upon Her could worthily understand its greatness. Never was this most pure Dove excited to the least impatience against any creature, nor did any of the immense tribulations and sorrows of her life seem great to Her, nor was She ever dejected because of them, nor did She fail to accept them all with joy and gratitude. If according to the Apostle the first requisite of charity, and as it were its firstborn, is patience (I Cor. 13:4), and if our Queen was the Mother of love (Ecclus. 24:24), then She was also the Mother of patience, and her love is the measure of her patience; for when we love and appreciate the eternal good above all that is visible, we therefore determine to suffer patiently all that is painful in order to obtain it and avoid losing it. Hence most holy Mary in her love was patient beyond all that is created, and She was the Mother of patience for us. Flying to her protection we shall find this Tower of David with its thousand shields of patience hanging from it (Cant. 4:4), with which the brave ones of the Church and of the militia of Christ our Lord arm themselves for battle.

572. Our most patient Queen was never affected by the caprices of feminine inconstancy, nor indulged in outward signs of anger; all this She restrained by the aid of divine light and wisdom, though these latter did not do away with pain but rather augmented it, for no one could recognize the infinite misfortune of sins and offenses against God as this Lady. Nevertheless her invincible Heart could not be disturbed; neither the malice of Judas nor the injuries and insults of the Pharisees could ever cause signs of anger in her exterior. Although at the death of her most holy Son all the insensible elements and creatures seemed to have lost patience toward mortals (Mt. 27:45), not being able to suffer the injuries and offenses done to their Creator, most holy Mary alone remained unmoved and ready to receive Judas and all the Pharisees and high priests who crucified Christ if they had chosen to return to this Mother of piety and mercy.

573. It is true that without thereby passing the bounds of reason or virtue the most meek Queen could justly have been indignant and angry at those who delivered over her most holy Son to such a frightful death, for the Lord himself punished this sin in his justice. While pondering this thought I was informed that the Most High disposed that this great Lady would not have these movements and operations of anger, though She could have properly had them, since He desired to prevent Her from being the accuser of these sinners because He had chosen Her as the Mediatrix and Advocate, the Mother of Mercy. Through Her were to flow all the mercies which He desired to grant to all the children of Adam. He desired Her to be the one creature who could worthily intercede for sin and temper the wrath of the just Judge. Only against the demon was the anger of this Lady given free scope, and also insofar as it was necessary to exercise patience and forbearance,* and to overcome the impediments with which this enemy and ancient serpent obstructed her beneficent course.

574. To this virtue of fortitude belong also *magnanimity* and *magnificence*, because they in a manner partake of the nature of this virtue by giving firmness to the will in matters relating to fortitude. *Magnanimity* consists in pursuing great things and thus striving after the great honors of virtue. Its subject matter is therefore great honorableness, from which arise many qualities peculiar to the magnanimous, as for instance to abhor flattery and the pretenses of hypocrisy (for to love these is the part of small and mean souls); not to be covetous, selfishly looking only for usefulness, but rather to seek honorable and great things; to speak little of oneself, not to brag; not to be detained by small things, setting aside the greater undertakings; and to be more inclined

* cf. Eph. 4:26 [Ed.]

to give than to receive, for all these things are worthy of honor. Yet this virtue is not opposed to humility, for one virtue cannot be opposed to another. Magnanimity causes us to use our gifts and virtues in such a way as to merit the greater honor, without at the same time seeking honor anxiously and unreasonably. Humility, on the other hand, teaches us our relation to God and to abase ourselves because of our defects and our own lowly nature. Due to the special difficulties connected with great and noble undertakings fortitude, especially the fortitude called *magnanimity*, is necessary. This proportions our forces to the execution of great works, neither allowing us to desist from them in cowardliness, nor to attempt them with presumption, disorderly ambition, or vainglory, for all these vices magnanimity abhors.

575. *Magnificence* similarly points to the execution of great deeds, and in this signification it may enter into the perfection of every virtue, for in all virtues great things may be undertaken. But since there is a special reason or difficulty in great undertakings or sacrifices, magnificence more particularly is that virtue which inclines us to make great sacrifices in the prudent manner, so there be neither stinginess where much is required, nor prodigality where it is not proper, wasting and destroying without necessity. Although this seems to be the same virtue as liberality, yet the philosophers distinguish one from the other. Magnificence regards only the greatness of the cost, without attending to other circumstances, whereas liberality regulates the temperate love and use of money. One can therefore be generous without being magnificent, as liberality may stop short of its course when there is the matter of great and important favors.

576. These virtues of *magnanimity* and *magnificence* were possessed by the Queen of heaven in a manner unattainable by others capable of these virtues. Mary alone found no difficulty or hindrance in accomplishing great things,* and She alone did everything on a grand scale even though the matter was small in itself. She alone understood the full bearing of these virtues, as She understood all the rest. She could give them their full perfection without stinting them by any contrary inclinations, nor was She ignorant of the perfect manner of exercising them, nor of making them dependent upon the assistance of other virtues, for this is accustomed to happen with most holy and prudent men who, when they cannot attain entire perfection in all virtue, choose that which seems to be the best of them. In all her practice of virtues this Lady was so magnanimous that She always performed that which was most excellent and worthy of honor and commendation; however, though She deserved honor and praise from all creatures, She was nevertheless most magnanimous in despising it and referring it to God alone, and She preserved her humility while practicing the highest perfection of virtue. The acts of her heroic humility stood as it were in heavenly rivalry with the magnanimous excellence of all her other virtues, and were like richest jewels set in contrast with the beautiful variety of excellences which adorned the Daughter of the King, whose glory, as her father David said, is all from within (Ps. 44:14).

577. Also in magnificence our Queen greatly excelled, for though She was poor and without any affection toward earthly things, nevertheless She dispensed most freely those things with which the Lord furnished Her, as happened with the precious gifts which the Magi offered to the child Jesus (Mt. 2:11), and many times afterwards in the course of her life after the Lord had ascended to heaven. As Mistress of all creation She also showed her great magnificence by willingly yielding the whole of it for the common benefit and for the honor and worship of God. She instructed many in this doctrine and virtue which because of their vile customs and inclinations mortals practice with so much difficulty, and in which they never reach the proper perfection of prudence. Commonly mortals follow their inclinations and desires, seeking only the

* cf. Prov. 31:19 [Ed.]

honor and emoluments of virtue, and to be esteemed as great and extraordinary. The honor and glory of virtue is thus diverted from the Lord by their wrongful hankering, and consequently when any occasion presents itself for the performance of a magnanimous and generous deed they shrink back and fail to execute it because of the smallness and meanness of their sentiments. Since their desire of seeming great, excellent, and worthy of admiration nevertheless remains, they have recourse to other means proportionately deceitful and truly vicious, such as becoming angry, puffed up, impatient, sullen, haughty and boastful; yet these vices are not a part of magnanimity, but of smallness and meanness of heart. Hence, as such conduct and sentiments repel rather than attract honor, they do not gain the honor and esteem of the wise, but rather contempt and abhorrence.

INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

578. My daughter, if thou dost seek attentively to obtain a full understanding of the excellence and propriety of the virtue of fortitude, as is my desire, thou shalt come into the possession of a most efficient check for the guiding of thy irascible affections, for these are the passions which are most easily moved to action and are most apt to overstep the bounds of reason. Thou shalt also have the means of attaining to the utmost greatness and perfection of virtue which thou dost desire, and of resisting and overcoming all the machinations of thy enemies, who seek to intimidate thee in the pursuit of what is difficult in perfection. But take notice, my dearest, that the irascible power serves the concupiscible by opposing what impedes thy concupiscible appetite; thus if the concupiscible powers are disordered, loving what is depraved and only apparently good, the irascible will follow it and also become disordered, and instead of virtuous fortitude many execrable and deformed vices will result. This shall also teach thee that disorderly love of one's own excellence and distinction, and vainglory, which cause pride and vanity, will breed many vices peculiar to the irascible passions, such as discords, contentions, quarrels, boasting, strife, impatience, and obstinacy, as well as vices peculiar to the concupiscible passions, such as hypocrisy, lying, the desire of vanities, curiosity, and seeking to appear in everything more than mere creatures, rather than what they truly are in their sins and abjection.

579. From all these contemptible vices thou shalt keep thyself free if thou dost earnestly mortify and restrain the inordinate movements of concupiscence by the virtue of temperance, which I shall presently teach thee. Yet when thou dost strive after that which is just and useful, although thou must make use of fortitude and of the well-ordered irascible passions, it must always be done in such a way as not to pass the proper bounds, and there is continual danger of allowing oneself to be carried away by inordinate zeal for virtue when one is subject to self-love or any disorderly love. Sometimes this vice disguises itself and hides under the cloak of a pious zeal, and its victims, anxious to appear zealous for God and the good of their neighbor, are in reality deceived and ensnared into anger by selfish motives. For this reason the patience which is founded in charity and which is accompanied by generosity and magnanimity is very honorable, estimable and necessary, for he who really loves the highest and truest Good easily bears the loss of apparent honor and glory, despising it with magnanimity as vile and contemptible. Even when it is freely given by his fellow creatures the magnanimous shall set no value on it; he shall show himself invincible and constant in all his undertakings. Thus shall he advance, according to his opportunities, in the virtues of perseverance and patience.