

Immaculate Fortitude

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“Therefore I say to you, be not solicitous for your life.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“And in like manner said all the disciples: I will not deny thee.”

Friends, just think of it. Not long after saying these words, one apostle sold Him for thirty pieces of silver, then betrayed Him with a kiss. Then another apostle took up a sword to do battle in His defense, only moments later to cower in the dark, offering up three hearty denials until the cock crowed; and that one went away weeping.

Friends, although the entire apostolic band had just days before confessed, “Yea, though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee,” in short order, they all, save one, vanished into the night to save their own skins and, for fear of the Jews, hid themselves in locked rooms. Yes, the Shepherd was struck. And the sheep? Well, the sheep, they scattered. “Then the disciples, all leaving Him, fled.”

Only the one lone virgin among the Apostles, friends, sought in haste to alert the Virgin, who throughout the night followed the Passion which her divine Son was undergoing with a union of heart. And what she did throughout that night by heart, she did in body and soul on the way to, and at the foot of, the Cross the following day.

Thus St. Ambrose of Milan can assert: “When the Apostles fled, she stood by the Cross. With pious eyes she saw her Son’s wounds. She did not expect the death of her beloved Son, but the salvation of the world. When the men fled, the Mother stood before the Cross, and she stood untroubled.”

Or, as St. Bonaventure would have it: “When Christ suffered on the Cross, it was agreeable to her that the price of her womb would be offered on the Cross for us.”

Dear friends, in this final installment of our mini-catechesis on the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I call you to take note of, and to ponder anew, Our Lady’s fortitude.

And as you do so, remember: fortitude is not first the virtue of combat, but of constancy. It is the virtue underlying the aphorism, “A man’s word is his bond,” and which animates the saying of the Psalmist, “Blessed is the man who swears to his own hurt.”

Fortitude is the virtue which arms a man in his hidden mortal fight against acedia—that is, sloth—and her two sisters, cowardice and despondency. It is the virtue which enables the soul to pass its breaking point and not break.

Fortitude is the virtue which spoke through the lips of the Maccabean mother as she witnessed the tortures and deaths of her seven sons:

"I know not how you were formed in my womb; for I neither gave you breath, nor soul, nor life, neither did I frame the limbs of every one of you. But the Creator of the world, that formed the nativity of man, and that found out the origin of all, He will restore you again in His mercy, both breath and life, as now you despise yourselves for the sake of His laws."

Friends, what the Blessed Virgin started with the Annunciation's fiat, she continued by fortitude on the Via Dolorosa and at Golgotha, consenting to the immolation of the Victim whom she had conceived by the Holy Ghost and to whom she had given birth.

Fortitude is the virtue which brought St. Alphonsus Marie de Liguori to song as he contemplated the soul of the Blessed Virgin:

"Oh, what heroic fortitude does Mary display amid so much agony! There she stands beneath the Cross, deeply immersed in the consideration of the wounds and sufferings of her divine Son. Yet she sheds not a tear."

Fortitude is the virtue which ennobled and enabled that courageous woman to ascend Golgotha and to stand with head raised. Behold, dear friends, the virtue of fortitude. Behold the virtue which exposes the effeminate underbelly of the modern image of both man and woman.

In truth, fortitude is the virtue that puts the lie to all the public appeals to excuse the evident malice of those whose suffering is essentially self-inflicted; whose suffering is born of a refusal to accept responsibility for their own life, or their obligation to fulfill the duties which they owe to God for the nourishment and defense of the little ones He has entrusted to their care.

"Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother."

Behold the virtue which exalts in and emboldens the constancy of the humble, which snatches solicitude from their bosom, yet robs them not of their lowliness. And as you gaze upon Our Lady's fortitude, consider that she is given to us as a model to be imitated, and that some have done just that.

*Born poor in Lima, April's child of '86,
Isabel took the Rose and would not yield.
Against a mother's will she kept her vow;
cut hair, seared beauty, chose the hidden field.*

*Catherine's pattern taught her how to stand:
the fast, the chain, the crown beneath the flower,
the hut, the tiles, the nights that would not bend.
Fortitude made prayer her only power.*

*She sold her thread to feed the house and poor,
drew in the sick the city left behind,
offered her dryness and her ecstasies
for sinners, for Peru, and the purging kind.*

*Tertiary, recluse, unmoved, she died
at thirty-one, the Bartholomew dawn;
not broken by the long opposing years,
a model of the strength that holds till gone.*

Dearest friends, God gave us the Virgin Mary as an example of all virtues, but especially as an example of fortitude. And if we desire to be the children of Mary, then, like Rose of Lima, we must seek to imitate her patience.

And as you come to receive upon your tongues and in your persons the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I bid you take heed to Our Lord's exhortation: "Be not solicitous for your life." And beg of God the Father the grace to imitate Our Lady, who entrusted to Him the details of her life; the grace to persist with stately joy on the course of virtue and duty, so that you may know and enjoy something of the immaculate fortitude of the Blessed Virgin Mary, saying:

"Favor Thy Church unceasingly, O Lord, we beseech Thee, and keep her safe. And because apart from Thee frail man is wont to fall, may she by Thy help be ever withdrawn from harm and guided in good."

"Almighty God, Giver of all good gifts, who didst will that blessed Rose, imbued with the dew of heavenly grace, should bloom in the Indies with the beauty of virginity and patience: grant unto us, Thy servants, that, following the fragrance of her virtues, we may deserve to become a sweet odor of Christ. Who with Thee liveth and reigneth in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, world without end. Amen."

Saint Rose of Lima, pray for us.

Our Lady of Sorrows, pray for us.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.