

One

What is Virtue?

When we talk about the kind of people we want to be, one of the clearest ways to explain it is to talk about virtue.

Virtue is the perfection of the human being by perfecting the way we act. Human beings are designed in such a way that our character is expressed in our action, and then our action shapes our character. In other words, what we do is connected with the kind of people we become. So a virtuous person is a person with good character and that good character is confirmed and perfected by virtuous actions.

So, what's the definition of a virtue?

A virtue is a good action we turn into a habit that becomes a stable character trait by which we do the good quickly, easily, and joyfully. This is what the saints show us best of all, that it's possible to be a person who habitually and naturally does the right thing and enjoys doing it. In other words, having virtue is what makes you good and happy. So it's the goal of human nature to become virtuous.

So then how do we become virtuous? How do we get virtue?

Two

How do you get virtue?

The first step to acquiring virtue is to realize that we don't have it yet. A lot of times, we don't do the right thing, and what's worse, we don't *want* to do the right thing. Sometimes, even when we *do* manage to do the right thing, we don't enjoy it. Obviously, it's honorable and

sometimes even heroic to do the right thing when you don't want to, but that's not actually virtue yet.

A virtue is when you like being kind, and chaste, and humble, and generous, and considerate, and prayerful, and moderate in your speech. And where you *don't* like bragging, or complaining, or criticizing, or lusting, or being slothful.

So the first thing to realize is that most of us have a long way to go. But don't be discouraged, because all that means is that we're beginners. And it's always tough when you start.

But again, that brings us back to the question: how do we start to acquire virtue? How do we get to the point where being good is so easy that we enjoy it?

Three

You have to practice

Becoming virtuous is like gaining any skill, like the skills of learning a foreign language and learning to play piano or shooting a basketball.

Now when you begin a foreign language, it's not easy, and it's not much fun. You have a hard time making sense of anything (why does everything have to be masculine and feminine? How many words do they need for "the"?) And whenever you try to talk in the new language, you sound really silly, you can't even make childishly simple sentences without mistakes, and you spend all your time trying not to screw up. This is why so many people, especially English speakers, just give up before they reach fluency in a foreign language.

Because it's hard, it feels artificial, restrictive, and unpleasant, and you spend most of your time trying not to screw up.

But those of you who have stuck with it, and become fluent in a foreign language – you know what a transformative thing it is. How you can think in another language, read the literature of another people, make jokes, feel at home in a fantastically different culture, and appreciate the unique insights which are incarnated in different languages.

You get something similar when learning to play piano. You have to start by holding your hands like you're a menace to society. There are these weird little black dots and you have to learn that every good boy does fine, and you do drills that sound awful. It's uncomfortable, and it has nothing to do with the music you like, you're lucky if you can play Mary Had a Little Lamb, and again you spend your time trying just not to make mistakes.

But if you stick with it, what a superpower it is to play piano beautifully! To be able to have the music of the great composers pass through your body and out into the air! To compose on your own, maybe, and to make music with other people spontaneously – which is a kind of community experience and thrill you can't imagine if you haven't felt it.

The point is: it's worth it. It's worth it to commit to certain skill sets that can change your life. And that's exactly what virtue is. Only it's the skill set of happiness.

Four

Moral Life Beginners vs. the Advanced

So when we look at learning piano and a foreign language we see that there's a world of difference between beginners and those who are

advanced. Beginners find the whole process artificial, unnatural, arbitrary, restrictive, and unpleasant – and then spend their energy mostly trying not to screw up. But if you *stick with the program*, if you persevere, you find that you become freer, able to do things you would never have imagined. It's almost like a super-power, and it makes you happier.

Now notice what people say about the Church's moral teachings. Notice the criticisms the outside world makes. They say the Church's rules are arbitrary, restrictive, unnatural, and unpleasant, and that it's focused on avoiding doing the wrong thing. There are all these "thou shalt nots," they say.

What does that show? Does it show that there's something wrong with the Church's program? No! It just shows that these people are beginners in acquiring virtue. But if they commit to the program and stick with it, they can become excellent. They can become saints.

Even worldly people are forced to acknowledge the amazing example of the saints, the astonishing goodness and happiness of Mother Teresa and St. Francis and John Paul II. And these saints are just those who have stuck with the program until they have advanced to the point of great virtue.

And that's what we should all be doing.

Five

A simple plan to gain virtue

Receive Jesus in the Eucharist as often as possible. He's the goal of life, we want to be united to Him, because only He can give us the divine life.

Think about the way God wants you to live in daily meditation, like we are right now in the Rosary. Make a decision, a resolution to practice some good action that is inspired by your meditation. By practicing good actions we turn them into habits and we become virtuous. But without Jesus in the Eucharist, without thinking about how he wants us to live in meditation, and without practicing good resolutions, good actions – we will never make it.

But if you commit and persevere, you will make it, I promise!