

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH

FORTITUDE

Catechism of the Catholic Church:

“*Fortitude* or courage is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause. ‘The Lord is my strength and my song.’ Jesus said, ‘In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’” (CCC 1808).

What is the virtue of fortitude?

Fortitude is the acquired habit of showing strength or courage. Fortitude can be described by words as persistence, staying power, determination, hanging in there over the long haul, and a firmness of mind or spirit in the daily challenges of life.

- A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do good. We develop virtues or good habits through education, good acts frequently done, and perseverance in struggle.
- The *natural* virtue of fortitude makes people willing to be persistent over a period of time in facing setbacks, failures, and misunderstandings, in order to accomplish a goal that they have set for themselves. The ultimate goal of a natural virtue is a good, decent life in this world.
- The *supernatural* virtue of fortitude enables someone, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, to face extreme danger and endure life threatening difficulty to achieve the ultimate goal of salvation or help others achieve the same. This courage is founded upon Christ’s promise of eternal life with Him.
- The virtue of fortitude has two components – endurance and enterprise. Endurance helps us to keep going when we are fatigued, suffering, weak, exhausted, or facing discouragement. Enterprise helps us to undertake great deeds while withstanding hardship. Enterprise requires initiative to see a need and take on the responsibility to carry out a plan for the good of others.

Why do we need the virtue of fortitude?

- Fortitude allows us to push ourselves to do any difficult or distasteful undertaking especially when it is inconvenient.
- Fortitude helps us to resist fear, foolhardiness, indifference and the single focus on selfish interests solely for pleasure or other’s admiration.
- We need fortitude to overcome fear of bodily pain, temporal loss, ridicule, what people will think or say, and the displeasure of friends. It is not easy to go against what is popular. In some situations, in reaction to fear, we can yield to what we know to be sinful.
- It takes courage to stand up for what is right. Hope in the face of difficulty is what makes courage. The most courageous actions are based upon hope in eternal life.
- The self-confidence we gain through the development of our God-given talents helps us to live out the virtue of fortitude.
- Our task is to ask for and cooperate with God’s grace in developing the virtue of fortitude, and allowing Him to perfect it in us.



Saint Bernadette Soubirous
1844-1879
Picture: Lourdes, France

In Brief:

ON CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE

“Lord Jesus Christ,...
Goodness and love
for souls brought You
to a terrible suffering
and death.

When we face
the difficulties and darkness
of life, including our own
passion, give us the grace
to follow Your example in
Gethsemane. Help us to
say to the Heavenly Father,
‘Your will be done.’ Amen.”

The Virtue Driven Life
Father Benedict Groeschel,
C.F.R.

Sacred Scripture:

“*Be strong in the Lord and
in the strength of His
power. Put on the whole
armor of God, so that you
may be able to stand
against the wiles of
the devil...*

*Take up the whole armor of
God, so that you may be
able to ... stand
firm...Fasten the belt of
truth around your waist
and put on the
breastplate of
righteousness.”*

(Ephesians 6:10–11; 13-14)

Fortitude

Saint Bernadette

*"In fact, when one considers Bernadette's life ... we are pleased to say, for the greater glory of God, this life can be summed up in three words: Bernadette was **faithful** to her mission, she was **humble** in glory, she was **valiant** under trial."*

The "Decree on the heroic nature of the virtues of the Venerable Sister Marie-Bernard Soubirous"

Venerable Pope Pius XI
November 18, 1923



Sister Marie-Bernard Soubirous



Grotto: Notre Dame Catholic Church, Chippewa Falls, WI.

FAST FACTS

Also Known As:

Patron of Sick People
Patron against Illness
Patron against Poverty
Patron of People Ridiculed For Piety
Patron of the Poverty Stricken
Patron of Shepherds
Patron of Lourdes, France

Feast Day:

April 16

Her Life

- Bernadette grew up in a loving family that was extremely poor.
- Bernadette was sickly as a child and suffered from a chronic respiratory ailment.
- Because of the family's extreme poverty, Bernadette did not attend school.
- At the age of 14, the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette 18 times in a grotto in Lourdes, France. Although crowds of people were with Bernadette at the apparitions, Bernadette was the only one to see and hear the Blessed Virgin. "The Lady in White" told Bernadette that she was the Immaculate Conception. She asked Bernadette to drink from the water of the spring and even though there was no spring, Bernadette tried to drink a few drops from the muddy ground. Days later a spring containing healing waters flowed from that spot.
- Church leaders were skeptical about Bernadette's visions. However, those who witnessed her apparitions saw evidence of Bernadette's trance like state. At one time a burning candle failed to burn her hand even though the flame was on her skin for over 15 minutes.
- Bernadette never sought publicity or fame after the miracles at Lourdes. She refused donations for herself or her family.
- She entered a convent at Nevers, France at age 22. In the convent, she worked in the infirmary and later she became a sacristan. Although she suffered continuously from asthma and tremendous pain in her knee from tuberculosis she was joyful, humorous, and great at telling funny stories.
- She died at age 35. Her body is uncorrupt and lies in a glass reliquary in the convent chapel.

How is Saint Bernadette a model of Fortitude?

- Bernadette was persistent in her efforts to return to the grotto even though her parents tried to dissuade her from going there.
- Bernadette endured relentless interrogations by town elders and the local police who wanted to determine if the visions were a hoax or if she was unbalanced.
- When Bernadette was instructed by the bishop and local authorities not to return to the grotto, she had the courage to return to the area and stand across the river from the grotto to say her goodbyes to the Blessed Virgin.
- Bernadette had the fortitude to endure repeated interviews with senior priests at the convent. She displayed remarkable patience even though these interviews were exhausting in her state of failing health.
- After she left Lourdes, Bernadette endured, with great love, the misunderstanding shown to her regarding the apparitions from Mary.

Practices to foster the growth of the virtue of fortitude

- **Prayer to Saint Bernadette:**

Dear St. Bernadette, humble little shepherdess, who wonderingly beheld the Lovely Lady of the Grotto, pray for us to our Lady of Lourdes that she may heal us of our ills, both physical and spiritual, and help us to stand firm in our love for God through daily prayer and following His will.

St. Bernadette, pray for the sick and the afflicted. Grant them strength and courage to accept God's plan for their life. Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us!

- Make a list of the words that describe the virtue of fortitude. Name a situation in which you practiced the virtue of fortitude. Discuss that the practice of fortitude usually involves inconveniences and discomforts.
- What activities help us to develop the virtue of fortitude, including pushing ourselves despite difficulties and hardships? Discuss how endurance, an essential component of fortitude, is needed in the activities that were discussed and in ordinary activities of life. Effort, including inner drive and toughness, is needed to stick with a team or activity until the end of a season or completion of the project and success is not always guaranteed.
- Enterprise helps us to undertake deeds while withstanding hardship. Enterprise requires initiative, and sensitivity along with thoughtfulness to see the needs surrounding us. Then fortitude shifts into gear to push us to fulfill those needs through the grace of God, our own efforts, and the efforts of those who join to help us. Discuss how great missionaries, explorers, researchers, and inventors practiced enterprise such as St. Francis Xavier, St. Joan of Arc, St. Junipero Serra, Blessed Mother Teresa.
- To be courageous one must have self-confidence. This comes not only from the realization that we are sons and daughters of God but also from the effort to develop the talents God has given to us. A person who lacks confidence in his own abilities and qualities can become cowardly through not daring to do anything worthwhile. If God asks or expects us to do something, He always provides the graces, means, and the ability to do it. Allow students the opportunity to write down their God-given gifts and how they can continue to develop these gifts.
- Discuss the difference between natural and supernatural fortitude. "A soldier, for example, who braves the dangers of battle for love of country practices natural fortitude. But the saint who overcomes all difficulties and dangers for the sake of the glory of God and the salvation of his soul practices supernatural fortitude. It is in the presence of the fear of death that fortitude reaches its peak; that is why the highest peak of supernatural fortitude is martyrdom." (*The Seven Virtues*, Most Rev. Fulton J. Sheen, p. 14.)
- "Fortitude is the virtue of the saints, martyrs and heroes." Discuss how students are to accept good principles and to take a position against a moral evil. How are we to practice what we preach?
- As a class, read about a Saint and together discuss how this person models the virtue of fortitude. Examples: St. Perpetua, St. Felicity, St. Joan of Arc, St. Monica, Father Walter Cizek S.J., St. Padre Pio,
- A deep faith, founded on daily prayer is necessary to practice fortitude, especially in extremely difficult situations. Without faith united with prayer, fear can paralyze one from acting in a heroic manner. Discuss heroes in the Bible that have practiced fortitude in an exemplary fashion such as Abraham, Moses, Joseph son of Jacob, Queen Esther, Daniel in the lions den, St. Peter and St. Paul.

- Read one of the Scripture passages and pick a word or phrase that stood out for you:
Daniel 3:13-24 Three men in the fiery furnace practice heroic virtue of courage in the face of execution
Psalms 23 Having courage in the midst of the fears that we experience in life.
Psalms 42:5-6 and *Psalms* 43:2-5 Maintaining hope in God in the midst of discouragement or despair
Psalms 91 Enduring confidence in God’s protection in trying or dangerous situations.
- Pray, using *Lectio Divina*, a Scripture passage which focuses on the virtue of fortitude.
Mark 10:46-52 The blind Bartimaeus displays courage in his determination asking Jesus to heal him.
Matthew 26: 36-46 Jesus perseveres in prayer on the night before He is crucified.
Luke 11:5-13 Jesus teaches about persistence in prayer.
Luke 18:1-8 The widow who never gave up in demanding justice
- Brother Lawrence, a seventeenth century Carmelite monk, in his classic *Practicing the Presence of God*, speaks clearly of the primacy of grace regarding the development of virtue. “When an occasion of practicing some virtue offered, he addressed himself to God saying, ‘Lord, I cannot do this unless You enable me.’...When he had failed in his duty, he simply confessed his fault, saying to God, ‘I shall never do otherwise if You leave me to myself; it is You who must hinder my falling, and mend what is amiss.’”
 Discuss the primacy of grace in living the virtues and the meaning of Brother Lawrence’s words.
- Memorize famous sayings, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”
 Winston Churchill, “Never, never, never give up.”
- Memorize a Scripture that is based upon fortitude:
Exodus 15:2 “My strength and my courage is the LORD, and He has been my Savior.
Psalms 23:4 Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil for You are at my side; Your rod and staff give me courage.
Psalms 27: 13-14 But I believe I shall enjoy the LORD'S goodness in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the LORD!
Matthew 14:25-27 During the fourth watch of the night, [Jesus] came toward them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. "It is a ghost," they said, and they cried out in fear. At once (Jesus) spoke to them, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.
Hebrews 12:1 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...”

Christ is the perfect example of living the virtue of fortitude.

Patience and Fortitude are related as the convex and concave sides of a saucer.

Fortitude is exercised in the active struggles with dangers and difficulties,
 while Patience is the passive acceptance of what is hard to bear.

Our Lord on the Cross practiced Fortitude by freely and fearlessly meeting death to purchase our forgiveness; He practiced Patience by passively accepting the Father’s will. Being God He could have stepped down from the Cross...But He willed to accept death to give us an example:

“Not my will, but Thine be done” (*Luke* 22:24)
 (*The Seven Virtues*, Most Rev. Fulton J. Sheen, pp. 20, 21.)

Additional Resources on the virtue of fortitude

Pre-school through Third Grade

- *Miniature Stories of Saints*, Book Four, Rev. Daniel A. Lord, S.J., William J. Hirten Co., Inc.
- *Book of Saints*, “*Super Heroes of God*”, Part 2, Father Lawrence Lovasik, S.V.D., Catholic Book Publishing Corp.
- *First Book of Saints*, *Their Life-Story and Example*, Father Lawrence Lovasik, S.V.D.
- *Picture Book of Saints*, Saint Joseph Edition, Illustrated Lives of the Saints for Young and Old, Father Lawrence Lovasik, S.V.D., Catholic Book Publishing Corp.
- *Saints Tell Their Stories*, Mitchell, Patricia and Lo Cascio, Maria Cristina; The Word Among Us Press, www.wordamongus.org.
- *Book of Saints for Catholic Children*, 96 Illustrated Stories, Lord, Fr. Daniel, William J. Hirten Co.
- *Bernadette, the Princess of Lourdes*, *Bernadette, the Princess of Lourdes*, video or DVD, Ignatius Press Publishing. (30 min.) Available from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization
- *Adventures from the Book of Virtues*, 3 DVDs based on the book by William J. Bennett, Ignatius Press.

Fourth Grade through Eighth Grade

- *Saints for Young Readers for Every Day, Volume 1*, Wallace, Susan Helen, f.s.p., Pauline Books and Media
- *Bernadette, Our Lady's Little Servant*, (164 pages). Ignatius Press.
- *Saints of the Church, A Teacher's Guide to the Vision Books*, Michael G. Allen (8 pages on Bernadette).
- *Saint Bernadette Soubirous, and Our Lady of Lourdes*, Pauline Books and Media (110 pages)
- *Bernadette, the Princess of Lourdes*, video or DVD, Ignatius Press Publishing. (30 min.) Available from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization
- *Bernadette, Her vision became a legend*, video, Ignatius Press Publishing. (120 min.) Available from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization

Ninth Grade through Twelfth Grade

- *Bernadette, Our Lady's Little Servant*, Vision Books, Ignatius Press (164 pages).
- *Saints of the Church, A Teacher's Guide to the Vision Books*, Michael G. Allen (8 pages on Bernadette).
- *St. Bernadette Soubirous*, AbbŽ Francois Trochu, Tan Books and Publishers (the best book, 400 pgs.)
- *The Song of Bernadette*, DVD, 2 hours, 36 min. (older version).
- *Bernadette, Her vision became a legend*, video, Ignatius Press Publishing. (120 min.) Available from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization
- *The Passion of Bernadette*, sequel to *Bernadette, Her Vision Became a Legend*. DVD (106 min.) Available from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:
As a Cardinal Virtue, paragraphs 1805, 1808
Imploring of the Spirit of strength, paragraph 2846

Resources for Teachers and Parents

- *The Virtue Driven Life*, Groeschel, Father Benedict J, C.F.R.
- *Raise Happy Children Teach Them Virtue*, Budnick, Mary Ann, R.B. Media, Inc.
- *Character Building: A Guide for Parents and Teachers*, Isaacs, David.
- *The Many Faces of Virtue*, DeMarco, Donald, Emmaus Road Publishing.
- *The Heart of Virtue*, DeMarco, Donald, Ignatius Press.

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.”

1 *Corinthians* 16:13