**Seeking Christian Virtue**

I. Some Basics

1. Scriptural Basis: 2 Peter 1:3-7, especially v.5

His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. ***For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge,*** knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, devotion with mutual affection, mutual affection with love.

2. Virtues Make Us God-Like (notice the scriptural text)

*Insofar as that is possible for us small human beings, according to the law of gradual growth and exercise.*

3. Seek These Goods According to Their Importance:

Highest order of goods – Eternal Life of the Trinity – relationships

Second order of goods – Creation – works and accomplishment

Third order of goods – Incarnation – wellbeing of the flesh and psychology

4. Any virtue can be found in Jesus Christ, so get to know Him

II. Most Fundamental Virtues for a Christian

*Note that I do not use the traditional breakdown of the 7 Theological and Cardinal Virtues. This is because I have found that those are helpful “speculatively,” as theoretical categories, but not so much in everyday life.*

1. Prayer

Make your participation in the sacraments contemplative. Study their meaning and effects and engage your imagination and mind when actually taking part in them.

Regular reception of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Penance.

Speak frequently with Jesus Christ and the Saints and your angel throughout the day.

Make time for mental prayer, 15 or 30 or 60 minutes daily.

Take part in devotions like the rosary, breviary, novenas, as time permits.

Make sure that prayer is having practical effects in your life over time; not mere self-pacification (which is why the method of yearly retreat, regular meditation, making decisions *in prayer*, and examining your fulfillment of resolutions is so helpful).

Frequently purify your intention.

2. Charity

A. Charity in Thought: see the best in others; include them in your plans; take initiative to make friends.

B. Charity in Speech: speak well of others, find ways to praise them, give them every benefit of the doubt, defend the honor of those attacked whenever possible. In conversation, ask about their interests, their life-experiences, seek to please them. Be quick to admit when you are wrong, even erring on the side of taking the blame when there is doubt.

C. Charity in Deed

With Family – STUDY HEALTHY FAMILY DYNAMICS. Our *greatest error* is assuming we already know how the relationships in families should operate. WE DON’T. Take the initiative to be an agent of change in your family, both your family of origin and your nuclear family. Your spouse should be *more important to you than your kids*, which is contrary to the idea that divorce is to be avoided solely for the sake of the children. Marriage should be first and foremost a spiritual friendship where a spouse is your first, most valuable help toward sanctity.

With Those in Authority – Seek out trusting, intimate, mentoring relationships. Entrust yourself to those in authority and build them up in speech, but if there is evil going on, look for the proper moment to call them out on it.

With Friends – Make more friends, always, at every age in your life. Create networks of friends with various interests. BUT, be content with only two to six intimate friends. *It is dangerous and usually unhealthy to have your spouse as your only friend*, because sometimes you will need support from a friend when the spousal relationship is strained. Frequently practice friendly correction courageously but gently, without ever doing it to satisfy your passions of anger and self-love.

With Coworkers – Do all you can to make work pleasant and recognize the value of others and their work, but don’t be afraid to *get work done*.

With Others – Whenever you have the opportunity, help out or enjoy time with others, even if it is just to make acquaintances even if they will never be friendships. Pray for those you will never actually come in contact with (e.g. “Those suffering in China.”)

With the Poor and Needy – Regularly participate in “charitable works;” *personally* help out the poor and repugnant, recognizing their dignity.

With All of These – Learn when to “blend in” and go with the flow of the group and when to speak out, act up, go contrary to the culture.

3. Health

Exercise at least three times a week, pushing yourself to attain modest goals.

Learn to see food in its proper place: *if it does not nourish your body or build relationships, it is trash*. Do not be American in this sense, where food is treated as if it were divine. “Eat by intelligence, not by flavor.” It is nobler to eat food for its overall effect on the body than for its flavor. Make sure you occasionally indulge in feasting, as is proper to human beings and a good life and building relationships.

Rest and recreation: neither constantly exhaust yourself nor give in to laziness. Strike a balance where you regularly rest and relax and take the time you need to re-charge, but are able to work and even to regularly sacrifice your comfort for the good of others.

Sleep: sleep enough so that you can engage in study and mental prayer without getting sleepy, but not more than 7-8 hours a night with the occasional 9-10 hours to make up for a deficit.

Do not be obsessive about exercise, food, rest, or sleep. Be able to put these aside for the sake of God, others, or work occasionally. Avoid the other extreme of becoming a slave to others, feeling a compulsive need to “prove” how much you can sacrifice for others – “I call you friends. No longer do I call you slaves.”

4. Humility

Humility is the most frequently misunderstood virtue. It absolutely is *not* mere self-deprecation.

Humility is knowledge of oneself in relationship with others. It requires knowledge of three things: of oneself, of others, and of the kind of relationship that exists between you. Humility is *truth*.

If you deserve praise, then *accept it* as a gift from others, glorifying God at the same time.

If you deserve punishment, then accept it nobly.

If you are proud, then place greater emphasis on others.

If you are vain, then value yourself and forget about what others think.

If you are in charge, then be in charge. If you are right, then be so as gently and charitably and cheerfully as possible. If you are subordinate to someone in charge, then defer to his or her opinion. If you are a peer, then be a peer.

In God’s world, *all things* come in hierarchy. To pretend everyone is absolutely equal is contrary to the truth. To pretend that you are the lowest thing ever is contrary to the truth (though sometimes it can be helpful to speak that way rhetorically).

The greatest thing a person has, *personhood*, makes him or her equal to all other persons. But any accomplishments, virtues, or office of dignity need to be recognized and respected for what they are. The same goes for habitual sins, failures, and lower rank. This is contrary to the American way of thinking.

Humility seeks to bring out the best in myself *and* in others, their spiritual character, so as to lift them up. It only knocks down when demanded by truth.

A. Humility in Thought: get to know your strengths and weaknesses, habitual accomplishments and habitual sins; get to know what makes people tick, what makes them feel, act, and think the way they do; see that the good always outweighs the evil in God’s good creation.

B. Humility in Word: be able to admit when I am wrong; do not deny the truth even if it hurts someone’s feelings; speak well of others without pretending there is never anything wrong with them

C. Humility in Deed: build properly hierarchical relationships; never forget to include others in your plans; act independently if you tend to act in a way that is overly-dependent on others; take the time to study the human person and human relationships

5. Time Management

Yes, this is a Christian virtue because it is necessary to place things in your life in the proper priority; what you love is not dependent on your intentions, but on the time you dedicate to them.

Therefore, learn to plan your day, your week, your month, your year, and your long-term goals realistically, flexibly, and aggressively, being always detached enough to change your plans because of the needs of others or the desires of those in authority; perhaps this develops the greatest kind of poverty, because it makes you aware of how often your time is not your own.

Goal: spend the proper amount of time on God, your own growth, your spouse, your kids, your family, your friends, your work, in the proper hierarchy, fighting to carve out time from things that do not deserve as much time as they get.

6. Patience

In God’s good earth, things take time. People tend to be dumb and learn slowly (including yourself, thank you!).

To become more patient, get to know how long things realistically take, overestimate the time things will take so you will always be pleasantly surprised when they finish early, relish and value the things that are accomplished slowly.