
COMMENTARY - THE VIRTUES TO BE REDISCOVERED AND LIVED/4

FORTITUDE (BEYOND THE CRISIS)

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If there is a virtue that is especially valuable in times of crisis, then it must be fortitude. It is the capacity to go on with life and persist despite long-lasting hardships. It is a spiritual and moral force that was considered extremely important by past generations, so much so that it was commonly called the cardinal virtue.

Fortitude keeps you from quitting when circumstances align against you. It is this inner strength that compels you to persist in your search for justice in the midst of corruption; it is what drives you to continue to pay taxes when others don't, to respect others when there is no respect and to remain meek in the midst of violence.

Fortitude keeps us well-tempered even when we are immersed in intemperance, gives us the strength to endure an ill-chosen workplace and keeps us with our family and community when everything tells us to leave, except our soul.

Fortitude is one of the virtues, but it also stands out as the pre-condition for us to be able to live the other virtues through our actions in difficult, long lasting situations. This virtue is servant to the others because it drives us forward even if there is no reciprocity. For this reason, there is a word that implies many of the meanings of strength today: resilience. It also suggests the ability to cling on railings, to not give in and to not slip down the many slippery slopes of our personal and social existence. This is why strength, above all, has always been - and is still - the salvation of the poor. It is thanks to this virtue that they can make up for the unjust lack of resources, rights, freedom and respect, and this is how they stay alive. It helps them persist during long famines and in the infinite absence of their husbands and sons who either emigrated or were lost in one of the many wars (there is a special connection between strength and women). Drawing from history and our times, Edmond Dantès (*The Count of Montecristo*) offers the strength of hope despite being imprisoned for decades just for being poor.

Fortitude too has the paradoxical logic of each virtue. There are decisive moments in life when strength has to be able to turn into weakness in order to really be virtuous. The quiet acceptance of misfortune, a serious illness, a failure, the death of a spouse or the last stage of life, reconciling when someone (or a voice from within) tells us that our hour has come. Our dignity and moral force in these moments of virtuous weakness surely depend on how much strength we have managed to acquire throughout our existence.

Strength is also essential to overcome temptations: a word that has been thrust beyond the horizons of our cities, because it is too real to be understood by our society immersed in consumerism, financials and games. However, temptations are there, and if you know how to recognize and overcome them, you will not become lost in life. It is your inner strength that compels you to refuse the benefits offered by morally unsupportable endeavors, and it prevents you from selling a good family business managed for generations with love and pain. It is this virtue that keeps you from indulging in an unwanted love affair and returns you home faithfully.

The economy is a part of life and therefore, to make life good, is in need of fortitude too. There are, however, two contexts where inner strength plays an essential part. The first one is in the life and vocation of an entrepreneur. Even if many people think - and unfortunately also write - the exact opposite, the market economy is not a system that offers a regular return for merit and talent, or a better return than other systems (like sport, scientific associations, family...). In the dynamics of the market, there is no firm connection between an entrepreneur's

virtuous behavior (innovation, loyalty, correctness, legality) and their success in the market. This connection often exists though sometimes it may not. The outcomes of a business depend on numberless circumstances that are out of the entrepreneur's control and do not depend on their merits. This is why worthy efforts may not always yield a return and that the prize may go to someone with less merit and talent. Misfortune may strike - and it does every now and then - even the righteous, virtuous entrepreneur, especially in times of crisis. Maintaining their fortitude may save them and keep them from giving up, getting them back into the race.

The second environment is completely inside organizations. When a company goes through periods of real crisis, especially if deep personal motivations are involved, their ability to overcome it depends on the presence of enough people who are sufficiently resilient. If no one (not even one person) is able to think beyond the logic of incentives and keep fighting without worrying about schedules and the waste of resources, then the company will not overcome the crisis. The art of directing a company consists mainly in knowing how to attract highly resilient people, how to keep them and how to strengthen their resilience-fortitude through their experiences at work. Strength in fact needs to be nourished continuously. If it is true that you learn to be strong by practicing being strong, it is even more true that, as a 'long-lasting virtue', strength is especially susceptible to exhaustion. An unmistakable sign that strength is about to be exhausted (or is exhausted) is the common saying: "it is not worth it any more". This means that you are not able to see any value in the exhaustion of resistance. Therefore, it is very important not to consider the strength of others (or even your own) as an unchanging characteristic or take it for granted. It may wither and even die if it is not nourished (through one's interior life, poetry, prayer...), if those around a person do not express their esteem, compassion, appreciation and recognize, affirm that person.. You can resist for a long time in the midst of great difficulties if you are not alone and are supported by the virtues of others and your own, nurtured interior.

Finally, strength is essential to conserve joy, happiness and cheerfulness in life in times of trouble, illness or betrayal. One of the most sublime things in the world is the existence of people who can take real joy despite objectively bad and difficult conditions. This type of virtuous joy is but a hymn to life, a common good that enriches all those who are touched by it. The quality of having the necessary strength to conserve joy is no less precious and powerful than that which helps you to put up with life's difficulties and pain. This joy is but the sacrament of all virtues' authenticity, a fragile and powerful joy that renders the yoke of long lasting hardship easier, and even sweet.

Translated by Eszter Kató