

Homily: 20th Sunday: Cycle C: 2016: Jer 38: 4-6, 8-10; Ps 40; Heb 12: 1-4; Lk 12: 49-53
“Fortitude”

The readings today point to the absolute necessity of an abundance of the virtue of fortitude, in our souls, in order to live a holy life in God: this builds upon my homily of last weekend on the necessity of Faith and viewing this life in light of eternity. How needed the virtue of fortitude (courage) is, particularly in our day as the Catholic Faith is **a sign of contradiction** to the contemporary secular world. **The Catechism of the Catholic Church** gives a good definition of what fortitude is and what it does for the believer, “*Fortitude 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 (see the lives of the martyrs), 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” (Ps 118:14). As Jesus says: in the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).* From (CCC, par. 1808).

1. **It’s not easy being a follower of Christ, as a Catholic today.** This may be the understatement of the year! 😊 But what a noble thing it is! Anything worth doing is going to be a challenge and difficult. We have to be willing to pay the price to be a faithful disciple. If Jesus went through the Cross to the glory of the Resurrection, we must do the same. There is NO WAY AROUND THE CROSS! Not exactly a popular message in our “feel good” age. Look at Jeremiah, who was a Christ figure par excellence in the Old Testament. All he was trying to do is to preach God’s message with integrity to the Israelites: *which is the call to repent and to come back to the Lord, to the Commandments, to faithfulness, instead of running after the false gods of their age and trusting in human powers - and what do they do to him today? They throw him in a cistern full of mud and leave him there to die because they don’t want to hear the truth.* They love “the way of the lie.” In our time, if we live our Catholic faith with integrity, some people will try to cast us into “the mud”: *try to beat us down, to get us to compromise our values,*

our faith, our Catholic vision of life and love. Has this happened to us? How have we responded? Have we given in or stood our ground in a good humble way?

2. Remember what Jesus says to us today in the Gospel, that He has “*come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing.*” And “*do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you rather division.*” WHAT?!

This flies in the fact of our common perception about Jesus that He is a peaceful guy! Well, He is truly the “prince of peace”, but peace on God’s terms, not man’s! **Never forget that!** God’s peace is “the tranquility of order” as St. Augustine puts it, which means a sense of harmony that comes from being in union with God’s design, with His will, with His ways of holiness. **This is where the virtue of fortitude shows its importance; without fortitude we will cave into the world and compromise our faith and morals to “keep the peace.”** You see this in so many areas of life today: *family members who don’t say anything when their relatives are getting married outside of the Church; married people who do not take a stand with their spouse who insists they practice contraception even though they know it is seriously wrong and against the Lord’s vision of marriage; Catholic people working in the medical field who do not stand up for the Church’s pro-life teaching; Catholic people in the entertainment industry who don’t take a stand against the moral and spiritual denigration of the people portrayed in “art”, movies and television; Catholic politicians who go along with legislation that attacks the sanctity of life and marriage; Catholic people in the workplace who overlook serious ethical violations and cheating and stealing from others.* And we could go on and on with examples; **the bottom line is: all these examples show a lack, not necessarily of the gift of Faith, but rather, often times, of the gift of fortitude: that which enables us to stand up for the Catholic Faith when it is under attack, in general or in relation to us personally.**

3. **As we can see it is not easy to be a good follower of Jesus today as a Catholic!** But this is no reason to lose heart, because, guess what? The Holy Spirit is here to help us! He wants to bestow on us the gift of fortitude in abundance, if only we open our hearts to Him. The **gift of fortitude** is given to us in our **Baptism** and

bestowed on us in an even greater way in the Sacrament of **Confirmation**, so as to enable us to be holy adult witnesses to Christ and our Catholic Faith. How our witness is needed today, in a world awash in selfishness, materialism, secularism and lack of respect for true love and the gift of human life. **The Catholic way is the way of goodness, truth, beauty and self-giving love - the way that leads to eternal salvation. The saints of our Faith of every age show us this noble reality in a tangible, concrete way.** And as our late great Holy Father, Pope St. John Paul II put it so beautifully, *we must witness to others the gift of our Catholic faith, in total integrity, as they have the right as human beings, also made in God's image, to hear the fullness of the truth of God's love - which is given to us through the Catholic Church that Jesus founded and the Holy Spirit protects and guides to the glory of God the Father.* May all of us be about this noble task of witnessing (giving testimony), rooted in faith and fortitude, in our family life, in our workplace, our neighborhoods, with our friends, at school, in everything we do, for truly the salvation of our souls and the souls of those around us depends on it. Remember what we hear in the letter to the Hebrews today, *“Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not resisted to the point of shedding blood. (Heb 12: 1-4).* God bless you.

Recommended reading: Read a book about a Catholic martyr(s); in Church history - they, the martyrs, show us the virtue of Fortitude in its heroic manifestation, which we are all called to even if we don't die as a “red martyr” - all of us are called to the “white” martyrdom of dying to self on a daily basis in a spirit of reparation, for the good of the Church and the salvation of mankind in union with Christ.