



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

*GENERAL AUDIENCE*

*Wednesday, 15 November 1978*

*Beloved Brothers and Sisters,*

Speaking from the loggia of St Peter's Basilica, on the day after his election, Pope John Paul I recalled, among other things, that during the Conclave on 26 August, when everything already seemed to indicate that he himself would be chosen, the Cardinals beside him whispered in his ear: "Courage!" Probably this word was necessary for him at that moment and had been imprinted on his heart, since he recalled it immediately the next day.

John Paul I will forgive me if I use this story of his now. I think it can better introduce all of us present here to the subject which I intend to develop. I wish, in fact, to speak today of the third cardinal virtue, that of fortitude. It is precisely to this virtue that we refer, when we wish to exhort some one to be courageous, as John Paul's neighbour did at the Conclave, when he said to him: "Courage".

Whom do we regard as a strong, courageous man? This word usually conjures up the soldier who defends his homeland, exposing to danger his health, and in wartime, even his life. We realize, however, that we need fortitude also in peacetime. And so we highly esteem persons who distinguish themselves for so-called "civil courage". A testimony of fortitude is offered to us by anyone who risks his own life to save some one who is about to drown, or by one who provides help in natural calamities, such as fire, floods, etc. St Charles, my patron saint, certainly distinguished himself for this virtue when, during the plague in Milan, he carried out his pastoral ministry among the inhabitants of that city. But we think also with admiration of those men who climb the peaks of Everest or of the cosmonauts who set foot on the moon for the first time.

As can be seen from all this, the manifestations of the virtue of fortitude are numerous. Some of them are well known and enjoy a certain fame. Others are less known, although they often call for even greater virtue. Fortitude, in fact, as we said at the beginning, is a virtue, a cardinal virtue. Allow me to draw your attention to examples that are generally not well known, but which bear witness in themselves to great, sometimes even heroic, virtue. I am thinking, for example, of a woman, already mother of a large family, who is "advised" by so many to suppress a new life conceived in her womb, by undergoing "the operation" of interruption of pregnancy; and she replies firmly: "no". She certainly feels all the difficulty that this "no" brings with it, difficulty for herself, for her husband, for the whole family, and yet she replies: "no". The new human life conceived in her is a value too great, too "sacred", for her to be able to give in to such pressure.

Another example: a man who is promised freedom and also an easy career provided he denies his own principles, or approves of something that is against his sense of honesty towards others. And he, too, replies "no", though faced by threats on the one side, and attractions on the other. Here we have a courageous man!

There are many, a great many manifestations of fortitude, often heroic, of which nothing is written in the newspapers, or of which little is known. Only human conscience knows them ... and God knows!

I wish to pay tribute to all these unknown courageous people. To all those who have the courage to say "no" or "yes", when they have to pay a price to do so! To the men who bear an extraordinary witness to human dignity and deep humanity. Just because they are unknown, they deserve a tribute and special recognition.

According to the teaching of St Thomas, the virtue of fortitude is found in the man,

—who is ready "aggredi pericula", that is, to face danger; — who is ready "sustinere mala", that is, to put up with adversities for a just cause, for truth, for justice, etc. The virtue of fortitude always calls for a certain overcoming of human weakness and particularly of fear. Man, indeed, by nature, spontaneously fears danger, affliction and suffering. Therefore courageous men must be sought not only on battlefields, but also in hospital wards or on a bed of pain. Such men could often be found in concentration camps or in places of deportation. They were real heroes. Fear sometimes deprives of civil courage men who are living in a climate of threats, oppression or persecution. The men who are capable of crossing the so-called barrier of fear, to bear witness to truth and justice, have then a special value. To reach such fortitude, man must in a certain way "go beyond" his own limits and "transcend" himself, running "the risk" of an unknown situation, the risk of being frowned upon, the risk of laying himself open to unpleasant consequences, insults, degradations, material losses, perhaps imprisonment or persecution. To attain this fortitude, man must be sustained by a great love for truth and for good, to which he dedicates himself. The virtue of fortitude proceeds hand in hand with the capacity of sacrificing oneself. This virtue had already a well-defined contour among the Ancients. With Christ it acquired an evangelical, Christian contour. The Gospel is addressed to weak, poor, meek and humble men, peacemakers and to the merciful, but, at the same time, it contains a constant appeal to fortitude. It often repeats: "Fear not" (Mt 14: 27). It teaches man that,

for a just cause, for truth, for justice, one must be able to "lay down one's life" (Jn 15:13). I wish here to refer to yet another example, which goes back 400 years ago, but which still remains alive and relevant today. It is the case of St Stanislaus Kostka, the patron saint of the young, whose tomb is in the church of S. Andrea al Quirinale, in Rome. Here, in fact, he ended his life at the age of eighteen. By nature he was very sensitive and tender, yet very courageous. Fortitude led him, coming from a noble family, to choose to be poor, following the example of Christ, and to put himself in his exclusive service. Although his decision met with firm opposition on the part of his circle, he succeeded with great love, but also with great firmness, in realizing his resolution, contained in the motto: "Ad maiora natus sum" ("I was born for greater things"). He arrived at the novitiate of the Jesuits, travelling from Vienna to Rome on foot and trying to escape from his pursuers who wished by force to turn this "obstinate" youth from his intentions. I know that in the month of November many young people from all over Rome, and especially students, pupils and novices, visit the tomb of St Stanislaus in St Andrew's church. I am together with them, because our generation, too, needs men who can repeat with holy "obstinacy": "Ad maiora natus sum". We need strong men! To be men we need fortitude. The truly prudent man, in fact, is only he who possesses the virtue of fortitude; just as also the truly just man is only he who has the virtue of fortitude. Let us pray for this gift of the Holy Spirit which is called the "gift of fortitude". When man lacks the strength to "transcend" himself, in view of higher values, such as truth, justice, vocation, faithfulness in marriage, this "gift from above" must make each of us a strong man and, at the right moment, say to us "deep down": Courage!

*At the end of his General Audience address on 15 November Pope John Paul II had a special greeting and a word of comfort for the sick. He referred to the case of Mrs Marcella Boroli Balestrini who had been kidnapped at Milan on 9 October, and who has not yet been released despite her advanced state of pregnancy.* The Pope wishes to give special attention to the sick, to bring them an affectionate greeting and a word of comfort and encouragement. You, dear sick people, have an important place in the Church, if you can interpret your difficult situation in the light of faith and if, in this light, you are able to live your illness with a generous and strong heart. Each of you can then affirm with St Paul: "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col 1:24). Speaking of human suffering, my thought goes also to all the painful events which depend on the bad will of unscrupulous men, who for ideological reasons or for the sake of profit give themselves up to forms of violence, which do not stop even in the face of those human situations which have been regarded as worthy of particular respect by every people and in all times. How could I fail to mention, in this connection, the case of Mrs Marcella Boroli Balestrini, kidnapped in Milan on 9 October last and not yet returned to the love of her dear ones, in spite of her state of advanced pregnancy and precarious conditions of health? The Pope addresses his heartfelt prayer to the Lord to instil in the hearts of the kidnapers, and of all the persons involved in episodes of violence all over Italy and the world, thoughts of human sensitivity, so that they will end so many, too many, atrocious sufferings, unworthy of civilized countries. In the meantime, let the comfort of my fatherly Blessing go to the victims and to their relatives. © Copyright 1978 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana