

Why I Am Catholic

Virtuous and Moral Life

Another reason is the Church and the Bible's call to a life of virtuous and moral living. In a world that has lost its moral compass, I appreciate the Church steadfastly upholding the virtues and challenging us to strive for the high standards of our faith. Christ calls us to be authentic witnesses through our thoughts, words, and actions. And He sets the bar.

Christ says that we must take up our own cross and follow Him. (Mt 10:38, Lk 14:27) Paul reminds us that he has "competed well; I have finished the race." (II Tim 4:7) James challenges us to be doers of the word (James 1:22) and Peter devotes an entire section of his second letter as an "Exhortation to Christian Virtue."

The Church first speaks of the theological virtues (faith, hope and love/charity) and the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude). St. Paul reminds us of the fruits of the spirit (or of a virtuous life achieved by God's grace): "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Gal 5:22-23)

He adds the following explanation as to how this is done: "Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires." (Gal 5:24) It requires cooperating with the Holy Spirit who trains us and helps us to be disciplined spiritual athletes ready for the spiritual obstacle course of life.

The more these virtues grow in us, the more we are able to resist temptation and live the life God made us to live. If we do not resist, it will get progressively more difficult to live as we should. And we will have no peace and less awareness of God.

The opposite of the virtues are the vices and the Seven Deadly Sins: anger, avarice (or greed), envy, gluttony, lust, pride, and sloth (laziness). These are attitudes and actions that lead us away from God and enslave us in the chains of sin.

Pope Benedict XVI has written his first two encyclicals (doctrinal letters) on the virtues of love ("On Christian Love—God is Love") and hope ("Saved by Hope"). His third to be released early this fall is entitled "Love in Truth."