

Reflections

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Some Familiar Virtues

As the year begins, perhaps it would be good to cultivate some attitudes, for example:

Politeness (or tact). It is the fine instinct, the correct tact to know what love is asking for at each moment. The person who possesses this virtue does not go through the world arrogantly, self-centered and without being concerned for the interests of others.

The polite person always tries to do everything well; therefore, his/her conduct appears very clear and loyal. He/she knows when to be quiet and when to speak or to do something.

St. Francis de Sales, a great friend of these small virtues, explains it correctly: “Discreet silence is always better than truth without love.”

That politeness presupposes a constant battle against superficiality, vanity and selfishness. On the contrary, the conduct of a person with little tact is usually like that of an elephant entering a porcelain shop.

A famous example of this fraternal politeness is the Virgin at the wedding feast at Cana (Jn 2,1). She foresees the needs of the bride and groom by sparing them the bother and humiliation of having to ask for help. This “thoughtfulness of foreseeing the needs of others” forms part of fraternal politeness.

Another form of politeness is being able to listen attentively to others – also to those who are annoying and boring – without showing irritation or impatience.

That attitude can, at other times, be demonstrated in knowing how to instruct or teach those who are ignorant without embarrassing them or humiliating them. Do we have that politeness, that tact in our dealing with others?

Respect. It is about “respect for the originality of the other” – basis for our living together. We have to surrender to the fact that we are a mystery to each other. And to respect the other person, I have to discover him/her and admire him/her in his/her profound originality.

Respect in dealing with others also means to leave the other freedom of thinking and acting as he/she seems fit to do so. The ideal of our communities is to become one heart and one soul, but without each brother/sister losing his/her originality.

This respect of freedom is important not only in relationship with others, but also in relationship with other groups: each group is autonomous, has rights to its own life, forms and styles.

Moderation. Moderation is the happy medium of things... self-control in any circumstance... not being swept away by excesses but doing the right thing with balance in the complicated hustle and bustle of life. We are persons of extremes: everything or nothing; enthusiasm or desperation; success or failure. We go through life tumbling from one side to the other, making serene and tranquil advancement difficult. There will always be fluctuations, but they should be moderate, controlled and integrated into the rhythm of life in order to arrive at a safe port.

Equilibrium (balance). The ups and downs of life hinder us from seeing clearly. They shake the horizon and disturb the vision. Most important in life is to see clearly at the crossroads in order to be able to follow the way correctly. And it is not easy to see clearly in the confusion which surrounds us on the outside with the attacks of the instincts and feelings which choke us on the inside. The equilibrium or balance fails as well as the certainty and the independent point of view. Easily the wrong decision is taken. The worst option is chosen. The way is erroneous. To see clearly and choose better, one must recover serenity and return to the happy medium.

Questions for reflection

1. How can I practice moderation?
2. Are we respectful with each brother and sister even though we may know each other too well?
3. Do we allow the other freedom to think and act?

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