

# Learning the Virtues that Lead You to God

Romano Guardini

## Session 1

Study Questions – page 1 – 76

### *The Nature of Virtue / Truthfulness / Acceptance / Patience / Justice / Reverence / Loyalty*

The author reminds us that all virtues are found in their absolute purity in God. Is there a virtue above that you hadn't considered before as being an attribute of God, and how might reflecting on that help you grow in your understanding of that virtue?

(P.7) "Every genuine virtue entails a predisposition to spiritual joy and also to spiritual suffering" The author gives an example of this in relation to the effect of 'disorder' on an orderly person in their interior life, their relationships, and the world at large. With regard to the 6 virtues above, what are some examples of the 'spiritual suffering' that could be encountered by someone who has one of these as a 'natural virtue'?

(P.9) "Virtue extends through the whole of existence, as a harmony which gathers it in to unity.. It rests upon the fact that God alone is God and that man is His creature and image, and is obliged to obey the supreme Lord.. If this order is disturbed all things remain in chaos." How can deeper prayerful reflection on this help us and others better understand chaos in personal lives and in the world at large?

(P.11) "Different individuals are more or less related or alien to the different virtues.. and in our moral development it is well to begin with that which is familiar to us and then to advance to the conquest of that which is more alien." Have you encouraged others to reflect on which virtues they feel are more 'natural' for them and which are more 'alien' so as to understand themselves better, and have you been able to use your awareness of these 2 types of virtues in others to help them grow in their own understanding of themselves ?

(P.15) The Virtue of Truthfulness – "Truth telling, in order to attain its full human value, must be accompanied by two elements - tact and kindness for the person addressed, and courage when truth-telling becomes difficult." Have you experienced situations where you or another has been lacking in one of these two elements, and what has helped you or another overcome this in subsequent situations?

(P.22) "The Judgement means that the possibility of lying ceases because omnipotent truth penetrates every mind and illumines every word. Then falsehood will be revealed as what it is – an illusion and a nonentity". Do you think reflecting more on the final triumph of God and His Truth could help people become more aware of how critically important it is to live this virtue in our daily life, and to better understand how it strengthens and enriches personal and communal relationships?

(P.25) The Virtue of Acceptance - "True acceptance is the acceptance of reality - your own, that of the people around you, and of the time in which you live.. I can and should work on myself and my life to mold and improve it. First however I must admit the existing facts; otherwise everything becomes false." Have you seen situations in individual lives or 'the life of the world' where people refused to see and accept the reality in which they live? How were they, or could they, be helped to grow in the virtue of acceptance in this area?

(P.29) Guardini presents the idea that the opposite of pagan skepticism – ie the ‘love’ of one’s own ‘fate’ born of defiance - is “Christian assent to the way outlined for us by our own nature, with confidence that everything rests upon Divine Providence.” Some may claim that this leads to “weak submissiveness and passivity” however he says Christian assent means “not merely resisting pain and misfortune or enduring it courageously, but accepting its bitterness” and that this “deepens life, cleanses it and brings man into harmony with himself and Divine Will.” Have you found practical ways to deepen this virtue of Acceptance in your own life with regard to suffering, or seen it demonstrated in the lives of others in a way that could help you encourage your directees in this area ?

(P.35) The Virtue of Patience – the greatest example of patience is God, for “He does not become weary of the world He created or cast it away. He respects it and is faithful to it forever.” As we are created in the image of God we should imitate Him and exercise patience with regard to our experiences, relationships, world and also ourselves otherwise we will be “in constant conflict with our own existence”. Can you think of ways in which the world seeks to undermine people’s practice of patience, and how resistance to these temporal temptations strengthens the ability to exercise the virtue of Patience?

(P.53) The Virtue of Justice - “Do we give to those who live around us the beginning of the justice of destiny, which consists in trying to understand them? Or by our aversion, ungraciousness or bias do we reproach them for their own nature? Their existence gives them the right to be as they are so we should grant it to them in our disposition, thoughts, attitude and actions.” Does it seem that you, or your directees, have more difficulty granting this ‘justice’ to family members, or to those around them in the world? From what starting point would you begin in your reflection or discussion when you or someone finds it difficult to practice, or even begin to practice basic justice?

(P.55) “The first thing that everyone who thinks of Judgement should say to himself is ‘Judgement will be passed upon me!’ But there will also be a Judgement upon all human institutions and powers”. Do you think consideration of ‘personal judgement’ and ‘judgement of the powers of the world’ would be presented in different orders to people of different temperaments and if so, which consideration first to which temperament ?

(P.59) The Virtue of Reverence – Guardini says that “reverence appears in everyday life as ‘respect’ for others, and that it desires privacy for the other person” and he discusses how the “urge for publicity and greed for sensation finds pleasure in unveiling, stripping and causing shame and confusion”. Do you think social media is having an effect on people’s ability to reverence others and if so, what practical steps have you used yourself or suggested to your directees to help you / them better practice the virtue of Reverence towards others ?

(P. 64) The author makes the sobering statement “Ultimately all reverence culminates in reverence for the holy. But the holy provokes the rebellious spirit in man. Let no one say that he is a stranger to this – it lurks in everyone in consequence of the primeval rebellion.” Then he goes on to stress that “the basic act of reverence is the adoration of God. Usually we find only petition or thanks and less frequently, praise; adoration scarcely ever appears and yet is essential. ‘I adore God’ means I am aware that He is the Creator, and I am His creature; that He is holy and I am not. Adoration is truth in act.” Do you see this ‘rebellious spirit’ rearing its head more often in yourself or others during times of human desolation or spiritual desolation ? Have you experienced or encountered situations where time spent in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament has helped someone counter a rebellious spirit, and how have you encouraged Adoration to those unfamiliar with it ?

(P.71) The Virtue of Loyalty – the author defines this virtue as “a force which conquers time, change and transition not with the hardness of stone, in rigid motionlessness, but living, growing and creating.. It means standing by another and giving them the freedom to be what they truly are.” Have you thought of God as being infinitely ‘loyal’ to us and do you think reflecting on that can help us and others learn how to practice this valuable virtue ?

## Session 2

### **Disinterestedness / Asceticism / Courage / Kindness / Understanding / Courtesy**

#### 1. **Disinterestedness**

The person whose interests, agenda or biases dictate the direction of their relationships is egocentric and naturally, although perhaps unconsciously, perceived as a threat by others. “The more we seek to gain our own ends, the more the other person closes up and is put on the defensive” (p79). In what ways may our own lack of disinterestedness manifest that would hinder openness and security of the directees?

2. The self-centered, false self, “constantly emphasizing I, me and mine” (p81) is an interior bondage in opposition to becoming fully alive through the total gift of self. To grow in selflessness or detachment is to, “open himself for God, to become... penetrable for God... the door through which God’s power can stream into the world” (p81). What tools can be recommended, or questions asked that would lead the directee in the way of disinterestedness, detachment or trust in divine Providence?

#### 3. **Asceticism**

In the letter to Diognetus, 130AD, “The body hates the soul and wars against it, not because of any injury the soul has done it, but because of the restriction the soul places on its pleasures. Similarly, the world hates the Christians, not because they have done it any wrong, but because they are opposed to its enjoyments.” In the same way Msgr. Guardini states, “Much of the resistance against asceticism stemmed from the desire for license in following one’s urges and instincts” (p85). How can a soul be guided to embrace, in the light of the Divine Indwelling the source of all self-giving, the pain to reject self indulgence while growing in self-mastery?

4. Asceticism in the context of marriage, “A true marriage is a union of two lives; it is helpfulness and loyalty. Again, and again, each must accept the other as the person he [she] is, must renounce what cannot be. A genuine marriage can endure only through self-discipline and self-conquest. Then it becomes real, capable of producing life and sending life into the world” (p91). Tragically some marriages over time become lives lived separately under the same roof, how can asceticism, in concrete ways, be a tool to rekindle reverence and intimacy?

## 5. **Courage**

Identified by Msgr. Guardini in the following, "All this comes from God. He has given me to myself [as it is in its entirety]. I must accept my existence from His hand, must live it and carry it out. That is basic courage, and how necessary it is today when there is so much talk of nothingness, destruction oppressive fear..." (p101). He goes on to say, "[it is] courage which dares to face the future in confidence that God's plan will work out" (p103). With what means can souls be practically inspired to live out courage in what may seem like paralyzing personal struggles or disintegrating morality found in society?

6. "The courage that accepts life and meets it bravely in each instance implies a conviction that there is something within us that cannot be destroyed, but rather which derives nourishment from everything, becomes stronger, richer, and deeper through every experience rightly faced and carried out, because this something comes from the creative power of God"(p103). How can a soul come to discover and come to rely on this "something that cannot be destroyed" within that is present and empowering and yet avoid the realm of self-sufficiency?

## 7. **Kindness**

"True kindness requires patience. Suffering returns again and again and demands understanding. The failings of others touch us repeatedly and become more unendurable because we know them by heart. Kindness must constantly make effort and turn to others" (p111). What tools or experience can the spiritual guide draw in order to avoid faltering in kindness?

8. The attribute of kindness in a person can be understood but we, even though we draw our nature from God, can only understand the kindness, goodness, justice etc. of God as a mystery (p114). How can this be explained?

## 9. **Understanding**

The simple form of understanding is, "When I notice what the other person, with whom I am dealing, means. When I see why he acts as he does, why he lives as he does, and why he has become the person who now faces me" (p117). To delve deeper or extend ourselves further, encompasses a greater context of the other, "If someone becomes gruff and surly at a particular moment, then understanding means seeing how this feeling fits into the whole of his nature" (p120). What possible progression of building relationship or qualities of relationship, with your directee, would be necessary in order to achieve this depth of understanding?

10. In humility, "we learn really to understand our self only when we regard our self from another's point of view" (p124). "If we are successful in seeing ourselves without the egotism that distorts the picture, then what we see may be very unpleasant, but it will help us to get at the truth" (p125). On the flip side, with great love and tact, we can be that transformative gift for those around us; to seek out the beauty and truth of God's very life within another and then reflect it back to them. Share a positive personal

experience when someone reflected back to you, your true value, God's light shining forth from within you.

## 11. **Courtesy**

"It is consideration for the mood of our neighbor, sympathy for his weariness, smoothing over a painful situation, and so forth. A constant attempt to make life easier and to obviate the many and often strange, threats that endanger it" (p134). "It is 'form': an attitude, gesture, or action which does not merely serve a purpose, but also expresses a meaning which has value in itself, namely, the dignity of man" (p135). In what subtle ways may we or our directees accept a diminishment of *courtesy* which may be considered normal for today's society but to the great detriment of human dignity?

### **Session 3**

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#### **Gratitude**

#### **Unselfishness**

#### **Recollection**

#### **Silence**

#### **Justice before God**

#### **Gratitude**

As soon as the consciousness of the personal quality disappears and the idea of the apparatus prevails, gratitude dies. Gratitude can exist only in the realm of freedom. As soon as there is a "must" or a claim, gratitude loses its meaning. Gratitude can exist only with reverence. If there is no mutual respect, gratitude perishes and turns to resentment (p. 145).

He who gives the gift must do so with reverence for the one who receives; otherwise, he wounds the receiver's self-respect (p.144).

What would be an indicator that a directee might be lacking reverence for the receiver?

#### **Unselfishness**

To be unselfish would mean as much as to be objective, to fix one's attention upon the task and not to think of oneself; to do the work correctly and properly as it should be done (p. 154).

The more a person seeks himself the more he slips away from himself. The more important he considers himself, the more insignificant he becomes. A person is more truly himself the more freely he leaves himself for the other person with whom he is dealing or for the task that confronts him (p. 156).

Can you see a parallel relationship between unselfishness and justice and how they can both work together for the flourishing of the directee?

#### **Recollection**

If we ask ourselves what person is to be considered properly developed in this respect, the answer must be: he in whose life these two poles function in proper relation to each other; the person who does not lose his direction in outward matters nor become entangled with himself, but in whose life the two areas are well balanced and determine and perfect each other (p. 162).

How can we as directors help our directees find that balance between encountering the world while remaining grounded in herself? Which of the tools available in RC be most helpful for the directee's growth in recollection?

### **Silence**

To be capable of silence is a virtue. He who does not know how to keep silence does the same thing with his life as a man who would wish only to exhale and not to inhale. We need only imagine this to feel terrified. The man who is never silent dissipates his humanity (p. 176).

When someone has performed an act of magnanimity or delicacy, he knows that if he spoke of it, it would disintegrate. Therefore, he veils it in silence and keeps it to himself (p. 177). Only in silence is true knowledge attained (p. 178).

How can one help a directee distinguish between silence as a lack of noise and the virtue of silence, where the words are interiorly communicated to God alone?

How can the virtue of prudence aid the directee in discerning the moments where silence is necessary and where it is better to bring the matter to God alone?

### **Justice before God**

The justice of God, then, means that He fulfills His promises to man, and the justice of man consists in placing himself within the covenant, seeking God's kingdom first, putting it before all else, and trusting God's holy guidance. The Lord's Prayer expresses the attitude which should prevail here (p. 190).

How can one as a director help the directee grow in justice before God by growing closer to Christ as a person?

Can you see the value of the Beatitudes and the Works of Mercy can have in the deepening of this relationship?