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***CATHOLIC TEACHER
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Living and teaching virtues

Virtues : Serving the search for good

Integral and inclusive education is becoming a reference in educational projects well beyond Catholic circles. To put it into practice, having acquired teaching skills is not sufficient for the teacher. He still needs to experience the esteem of every human being, whatever their social status, and hold dear the conviction that all human beings, whatever their intellectual abilities, have a place in society and in the Church. This results in a life in which one endeavours to have virtuous existence. In his time, Emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius had already considered that endeavoring to acquire virtues was an essential task for all human beings. And Saint Gregory of Nyssa redefined this aspiration in the light of the Gospel by asserting in his comments of the Beatitudes : “The aim in leading a virtuous life consists is to become like God” (beat. 1)

Virtues can be summarised in the four so-called cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage and temperance. These are like the pivotal points (*cardines* en latin) on which moral life is based.

The Catholic Church’s Catechism gives us a presentation of these virtues in the Biblical and patristic reflexion (CEC n. 1805 – 1809). It would be interesting to adapt them to the mission of a teacher and educator, whose code of conduct they can help specially. I would like to suggest a few points of reflexion about each cardinal virtue.

Prudence in order to discern real good and carry it out.

Nowadays the word prudence has acquired a negative connotation, reflecting the idea of inaction or even withdrawal into oneself. Actually, prudence means a sound and right judgement before acting. The Bible thus tells about “the man of discretion who watches hour he treads” (Pr 14 : 15). In fact, prudence leads the other virtues by indicating to them the rule and the measure.

For the teacher, the place for prudence is first and foremost in the relationships with others. It raises a question: how much respect have for each pupil and how much attention they pay to each pupil? From the troublemaker to the most timid pupil in the class. Christ’s attitude comes to encourage our attention to this virtue. If his heart had not been inhabited by a deep sense of the human being, one can wonder if He could have cured the cumbersome Bartimaeus who shouted on the side of the road, or brought about salvation to the Good Thief who cried out his repentance on the cross.

For the teacher, prudence comes also to question their ability to lead people towards Good and help them achieve their very best. It makes them vigilant so as to avoid instrumentalizing their teaching to serve an ideology or personal opinions. For the Catholic teacher, the aim is to lead to Christ and to His Gospel with humility and respect for people's freedom. Here again, Christ's attitude may question us : His teaching about the Kingdom but also His whole being reminded people of God His Father. He revealed himself as being the servant and the Son of God and thus affirmed in His testament the eve before his death : " To have seen me is to have seen the Father" (Jn 14 : 9)

Justice to give God and the neighbor what is their due.

Justice does not first and foremost consist in analyzing and appreciating circumstances, but in being able to adjust to God and to others, to let them occupy the place they deserve.

Justice towards God means recognizing God as being God, recognizing Him for what He is, and thus developing the sense of prayer. Justice towards others means being concerned about equity and common good.

Jesus's response to the rich young man can be used as an example of justice. When asked about "what must be done to inherit eternal life, Jesus answers "No one is good but God alone" (Mc 18), inviting the rich man to get his life together and let God have the place He deserves, that is to say he must have the first place as beginning and foundation of life. Then Jesus invites us to stick to the commandments in a radical way out of love for God and others, and follow Him (Mc 10,17-22).

For the Catholic teacher, justice also consists in developing the sense of Church as being the place where God reveals Himself to the world and where each Christian can deepen their relationship with God and others according to their own calling and their state of life. Justice thus questions their affective and effective life in the Church. At the beginning of the Apocalypse, we find letters that Saint John had to send, on behalf of Christ to seven Churches representing the Whole Church. To conclude, Christ reminds us of the deep identity of the Church as a place of communion with God and between human beings: "Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share his meal, side by side with him" (Ap 3:20).

Courage to faithfully achieve one's mission

Courage does not mean spectacular achievements or acts, but steadfastness when facing difficulties, whether those are due to personal limits or to outside obstacles. It reveals that great realisations are not usually carried out in a dramatic way but in an ordinary.

For the teacher, Force means a faithful pursuit of their mission. And for the believer, it is to be found in their love for Christ. In His last speech in the Cenacle, Jesus invited His disciples to lean on His victory over the worldly powers who oppose God and His salvation project : "In the world you face persecution. But take courage, I have conquered the world ! » (Jn 16,33) That call for courage is followed on Whitsun by the gift of the Holy Spirit who cleanses and strengthens hearts. The tongues of fire mean that the Spirit is like the fire which burns the hearts of the disciples, out of the Love of God Itself, stronger than evil and death. And the wind by which the Spirit manifests Itself is like the breath which unites them with the risen Christ and leads them from the house where they were hiding towards the world at large to faithfully serve the Gospel.

Temperance to unify one's life

It is interesting to notice the widening on the meaning of temperance in the Biblical tradition. In the Old Testament, temperance means mastering one's passions : "Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites" (Sir 18,30). And in the New Testament it becomes a synonym of moderation and sobriety: St Paul thus invites us "in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly." (Titus 2, 12).

For the teacher, temperance comes to question their teaching and their testimony as for the balance and unity of their lives. That concerns issues of life rhythm and attention given to all forms of addiction, but also integral education linking faith and reason, religious and intellectual approaches.

For the catholic teacher, temperance as balance and unity of life, reminds them of baptism which gives both an identity, as a Christian, and a mission, serving the Gospel. If God is linked to each Human being, baptism affirms it and explicitly realises it. It enables the baptised to personally welcome the Word which God gave Jesus when He was baptised by John : "You are My Son, the beloved ; with You I am well pleased." (Mc 1,11). Temperance for the baptised then is that virtue of balance between their consecration and their mission, between their surrender to Christ and their involvement in work.

Virtues : Serving holiness

Practising virtues may appear demanding and even impossible. By meditating on the life of Christ we find a model, and by welcoming the work of the Holy Spirit in us we find a support. Therefore each of us can practice virtues according to their own calling and educational responsibilities. Being faithful to prayer and sacraments, they will be able to advance on the way to holiness by maintaining their desire to know the light of Truth and to know the joy of loving.

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