

Saint Paul continues his letter to the Galatians with a list of vices and virtues. He speaks of “hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions” (5:20). Sadly, under the stress of the pandemic, we have either experienced or witnessed some very bad behavior. The devil is an expert at bringing out the worst in us by wielding his tactics of deception, division, diversion, and discouragement to pull us away from God.

When we choose evil, we always choose it as an apparent good. Think of Adam and Eve. They thought they were choosing something that would help them. They did not realize they were being deceived in choosing to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We need to be alert and discerning to the devil’s tactics. We need to put on the mind of Christ and think like him and feel like him, so we choose the virtuous thing in the face of the temptation to act otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus is the victor over sin and death, and he gives us hope that we can follow in the way of holiness. So, let us focus on some of the virtues that Saint Paul highlights. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:23).

Love is the antithesis of selfishness. We see in the sacrificial love of Jesus a willingness to lay down his life for our salvation. Jesus himself commands his followers, “Love one another as I love you” (John 15:12). Saint Paul also spoke of this love in the book of Ephesians when he invited husbands to lay down their lives for their brides as Christ did for the church. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word . . . that she might be holy and without blemish” (5:25-27).

Sometimes love is translated as charity. We feel loved by God and we respond with love for our neighbor. Instead of looking out for ourselves, we look out for others. We recognize how much God has done for us, and we respond in kind with a generous heart to help others. With love and charity come a sense of peace. Imagine that you hear a child screaming and crying and throwing a tantrum. A mother responding in love, may recognize the child is unable to put into words what is upsetting them. At peace, she does not let the screaming annoy her, she looks beyond to see what the need of the child is. She discerns whether the child is hungry or hurt and responds accordingly.

When we do good, we feel good. There is a spiritual joy that comes from helping others and acting unselfishly. Jesus himself teaches, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). But our motives must be pure. If we scratch someone’s back so they will scratch ours, we are looking for some reward. Jesus teaches us instead to give without expecting something in return. Don’t let your right hand know what your left is doing (Mt 6:3). With a pure heart and a generous spirit, the Lord will see the good we do and that is reward enough.

Saint Paul speaks of gentleness and self-control. In the movie, the Karate Kid, Mr. Myagi challenges Daniel to catch a fly with chopsticks. If he can do that, then Daniel will be able to accomplish anything. Daniel will need to really apply himself to be able to master the martial arts and it will call for endless hours of practice in order to master self-discipline. In our spiritual life, growth in virtue requires us to follow the example of the master, Jesus. Our time in prayer, our time in reading and reflecting on the Word of God, and countless hours of selfless service will help us to grow in holiness enabling us to be more gentle with others and to practice self-control.

When we are most stressed, it is easiest to give into the temptation of a vice. The devil doesn’t fight fair. When we are at a low point, sometimes we are most open to asking God for help. So, let us never tire of asking our Lord for assistance. “For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened” (Mt 7:8).

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<sup>1</sup> [discerninghearts.com/catholic-podcasts/ip131-fr-louis-cameli-the-devil-you-do-not-know-on-inside-the-pages-2/](https://discerninghearts.com/catholic-podcasts/ip131-fr-louis-cameli-the-devil-you-do-not-know-on-inside-the-pages-2/)