

Manly Character

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CHARACTER is the foundation-stone of spiritual and temporal success. It is that trait which makes a man attractive; that stamps his deeds with loyalty and sincerity. For true Christian character is nothing other than faithfulness and devotion to God, to neighbor and to self, manifested in the ordinary, every day actions of life. Character is cemented in self-sacrifice. Individual characteristics attract or repel. They serve as barometers by which others gauge a man's actions as ornamental or detrimental to the community. Most men readily recognize and cultivate their good points. Few sufficiently reflect upon their weaknesses and deficiencies. The world has a standing advertisement for a 100% man, a man who realizes that "life is just what he makes it." To become the chosen applicant a man must analyze what it is that makes one neighbor attractive and entertaining; another, repulsive and boring. He should take the means to remedy the defects that keep him from the cherished goal of steadfast Christian manliness. There is no better tool to plane the rough spots than the acceptance and holding aloft of an ideal.

Honesty, honor, purity, truthfulness, kindness and generosity typify the ideal Christian young man. He is the sturdy type that recognizes there can be no true character apart from God. Spirituality, he perceives, must become part and parcel of a man's fibre to bolster up conscience in the harassing warfare of life. If actions are to be labelled with righteousness, then religion has a mighty role to play in the formation of character. A man with this viewpoint is admired and respected by his associates; he is welcomed by any wide awake office manager; he is helped and encouraged by his elders in the professional world. He means to be successful because he cultivates the outstanding features of manliness.

Nothing is more attractive than honesty in the Catholic young man. St. Thomas gives us the key to our admiration for those who possess this virtue when he tells us that "a thing is

said to be honest in so far as it has a certain beauty through being regulated by reason. * * * Wherefore an honest thing is naturally pleasing to man." This attraction towards the enhancing virtue of honesty begets imitation and leads man to the better fulfillment of the requirements of charity—"love the Lord thy God" and "thy neighbor as thyself"—and the noble virtue of justice—"he that doeth justice is just."

A young man is honest with himself when, realizing the continual struggle between spirit and flesh, he takes the necessary means to root out his personal defects—such as indifference in the practice of religion, pride, anger, jealousy and the like. "Regulated by reason" in his dealings with the neighbor, the Catholic youth endeavors to aid his neighbor even as he desires to be helped. He is kind in thought and deed; he stands ready to lend a helping hand in adversity and difficulty; he is silent, at least, when misunderstanding comes between him and the neighbor.

One of the most efficacious means God has given man to love the neighbor is the blessed gift of cheerfulness. The fellow who meets the world with a smile is envied and admired. His example is worthy of imitation, for thereby difficult acts are rendered pleasing and easy. The world is grim and cold: it needs a little brightness and sunshine. The precious boon of wit and a contagious smile will turn enemies to friends; will smooth over difficulties; will make progress through this "vale of tears" a happier one for all concerned.

The man of honor has the courage of his convictions. He is untiring in doing good, strong in temptation and brave in bearing adversity. His honor is not confounded with mere worldly fame. The Catholic young man models his actions not on material standards but according to the law of God. Imbued with justice he avoids dishonor. "Justice," according to the Angelic Doctor, "is a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will." There is "due" every man at all times and in all circumstances the right to his fair name and reputation. Catholic men are bound to observe this injunction of justice. No matter, at times, how great the injustice perpetrated against an individual, he should always bear in mind that retaliation, when it causes acts against this virtue, is impossible. Justice, on the other hand, does not demand that

a man be silent when wrong is committed or calumnies are spread abroad. It does, however, dictate the course of action to be pursued and tempers righteous anger on such disagreeable occasions. In adverse circumstances justice prompts a man to demonstrate to the world that he can be of manly character; a man who is above mud-flinging when his person or cherished interests are unjustly attacked.

But if a man be attractive because of his notable honesty, charity or justice, it is purity that stamps him a prince among men. Her usual preeminence in this virtue caused man to place woman upon a pedestal high above his head—as if an inspiration and an encouragement manfully to do battle with the flesh. “Chastity,” quoting the Angel of the Schools, “takes its name from the fact that reason chastises concupiscence, which, like a child, needs curbing.” On this common battle-field the enemy—the world, the flesh and the devil—are united, each seeking to defile “the temple of God,” as St. Paul styles the body. Of these three common adversaries, the flesh is, perhaps, the most insistent. A man’s greatest enemies are “those of his own household”—the members of his corporeal body. It is a fire that once allowed to gain headway and spread unchecked, will cause the whole spiritual and corporal structure to dissolve into a heap of smoldering, lifeless ashes. Here the attack is insidious. It begins in small things, like the dropping of a match, but soon causes a conflagration that can be headed-off and checked only with the utmost human diligence and divine aid. For some the battle is insistent and constant: for these St. Peter has said they “must be sober and watch.” Each one knows his own peculiar and particular form of temptation. All should recognize that they can be triumphant in the conflict only by the grace of God. It is necessary, therefore, to take the God-given means to insure a continuance of divine aid.

Next to personal chastity comes truthfulness. A writer has ably expressed the substance of uprightness in these words: “to thine own self be true; and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.” Present conditions call for Catholic young men who are unafraid to tell the truth—whether the facts concern their religious, business or social status. An untruth may save embarrassment or further a business transaction, but most untruths “come home to roost.”

Sooner or later "the truth will out," causing a handicap and a loss of reputation that is sometimes never fully regained. A man's word may be his only bond, but if that word be true, he has enough capital to make a success of life.

Scripture tells us that "a kind word turneth away wrath." At times it may not only avert anger, but be the cause of untold good. Life is not always bright and gay; tasks not infrequently are arduous and disagreeable. When someone is weary and disheartened: when cares and burdens are heavy, a cheerful word and a friendly glance will help dispel the dark clouds and make burdens lighter. It was their kindness to one another that distinguished the first Christians; that caused the unbelievers about them to exclaim: "see how they love one another!" Conditions may have changed, but human nature still responds to a kindly word or deed.

The man of generosity is an asset to a community. Realizing that the success and support of any movement ultimately rests upon the individual, he is generous to those who may be dependent upon him; generous to those in need; generous in the support of his Church; generous in the support of his country. This aid is not alone financial but likewise moral. There are occasions when deeds will accomplish what money cannot buy. Readiness for instant and effective service should characterize the true man of action, the "active doer."

The man who strives for and fosters these ideals of Catholic manliness need never fear his standing among his neighbors. He is at home in any gathering: he is equally the friend of the lowly, the associate of the wealthy. He makes himself "all to all" because he seeks not his own advancement but the happiness and prosperity of those about him.

"God give us men"; Catholic young men who are determined to be dutiful, truthful and successful; who are imbued with promptness, diligence, labor and perseverance: Catholic young men who are self-denying and self-reliant; who make their own opportunities; who model their every action on the dictates of conscience and the precepts of divine law; strong Catholic men who are unashamed and unafraid to attend Mass every Sunday and holyday; who are frequent and regular partakers of the Blessed Eucharist. Such men are the princes of God's earthly kingdom, God's "true noblemen."