**Virtues**

**A virtue is an acquired, stable interior disposition to habitually act in a way that is good.**

That is…

* *acquired*: that is it is not just a ‘natural talent’ but something that has been gained by way of living life in a certain way;
* *stable*: that is it has become, through practice and training, a regular character trait of a person;
* *interior*: that is it is more than just an exterior habit – the way of good has been internalized;
* *good*: that is it is ordered towards what is good (the opposite of a virtue is a vice, ie. The same kind of disposition but ordered towards what is evil).

The Catholic Tradition lists seven essential moral, and five key intellectual virtues, which together make a person ‘good at being human’, i.e. good at living in full accord with human nature, made in the image and likeness of God, that is: as possessing Intellect and Free Will. The Intellectual Virtues are ordered towards exercising a person’s Intellect well, the Moral Virtues make a person exercise their free will in ways that are good, i.e. make them a ‘good person’ in the moral sense. The moral virtues possess an integral unity, because a ‘good person’ will be someone who practices and shows them all to some degree.

The Moral Virtues are divided into ‘natural’ (or ‘human’) and ‘supernatural’ (or ‘theological’) virtues. Moral virtues from ‘character’ in the service of what is good: ‘We must work at forming our character so that we can freely, joyfully and easily accomplish what is good’ (YouCat, 300).

1. Among the ‘natural’ virtues, the so called ‘Cardinal Virtues’ are key:
2. The **Cardinal Virtues** are so called because on them all other human character strengths (all other human virtues) ‘turn’ or ‘hinge’ (the Latin ‘cardo’ means ‘hinge’ and ‘cardinalis’ means ‘principal’). They are…
* (Practical) Wisdom: is the virtue that ‘disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it’ (CCC 1806), i.e. the disposition to know how to put what is good into practice. It is closely related to ‘Prudence’ (see below), but as exercised specifically towards ‘moral’ activities;
* Justice: the disposition to give to each one what is their ‘due’ (‘suum quicue’ in Latin), without partiality, and understood both in terms of what they ‘deserve’ and in terms of what they ‘need’. It is exercised toward God as the “virtue of religion.", and towards other human beings as “respect of the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity” (CCC 1807);
* Fortitude: the disposition that ensure a person will not be deflected from pursuing what is good by any danger or obstacle; it “ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life” (CCC 1808);
* Temperance: the disposition that ensures a person will not be deflected from pursuing what is good by ‘the good things’ of life. It “moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created good” (CCC 1809) so that a person will not allow themselves to be overpowered by any desire for ‘worldly goods’ such as riches, honour status, etc. that falsely seek to become their ‘goal in life’;
1. The **Theological Virtues** relate a person directly to God, disposing a person to live in relationship with God. They animate the Christian’s moral life and are given as gifts from God rather than acquired (they are ‘infused’). However, they still ‘grow’ by means of their ‘exercise’ or practice. They are…
* Faith: is the theological virtue “by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us” (CCC 1814). It is exercised in the profession, confident witness to and living of the truths of the Faith;
* Hope: is the theological virtue “by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1817). Its exercise keeps us from and sustains us in discouragement, difficulties and trials;
* Charity: is the theological virtue “by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God” (CCC 1822). It is exercised in relating to God and our neighbor in the ways of ‘friendship’ that ‘will’ and ‘do’ their good for their own sake (rather than for our benefit or any external reward).
1. The **Intellectual Virtues** are certain ‘dispositions of the mind’ that do not make those who possess them ‘good persons’, but nevertheless persons who are good at exercising their Intellectual Powers, that is they are the five ways in which a person arrives at truth. Three of them are theoretical (i.e. ordered towards what is true in terms of knowing), two of them are practical (i.e. ordered towards ‘right’ or ‘true’ making and doing). They are…
* Understanding: the habitual knowledge of primary self-evident truths that lie at the root of all that can be understood or known (such as some principles of logic and ontology);
* Science (or ‘knowledge’): is the habit of conclusions drawn by demonstration from first principles (it is exercised in the particular sciences by means of ‘epagogical’ reasoning, i.e. a reasoning that understands the first principles of things from experience and experiment);
* Wisdom: is the habit of knowing things in their highest causes (i.e. knowing things as they really are, what their ‘nature’ is and how they are to be understood in their fullest sense and deepest meaning – it is exercised in philosophy)
* Art: (or ‘craftsmanship’) is knowing how to make things and how to produce some external object. It is exercised in the mechanical and fine arts.
* Prudence (or ‘practical wisdom’ as opposed to ‘Wisdom’ above, and linked to but distinct of the Cardinal Virtue of Wisdom by not necessarily being focused on the morally good) is knowing how to do things and direct activity that does not result in a ‘product’ (it is exercised in sports, for example).