

THE LITTLE VIRTUES

"The little virtues are social virtues"
(St. Marcellin Champagnat).

And we know that the family is the basic cell of society. In fact, we can say that the family is society in a nutshell. That is why what follows is a help towards renewing family spirituality. Our practice of these little virtues is the touchstone of the perfection of charity which gives life to our family.

1st Little Virtue: indulgence, by which we excuse others' faults, making little of them, quite simply forgiving them—although we cannot assume that we ourselves will be pardoned in the same way.

2nd Little Virtue: charitably pretending not to notice our neighbour's defects, wrongs, failings and inappropriate words; putting up with everything without saying anything and without complaining...

3rd Little Virtue: compassion, which soothes the pain of those who suffer, which weeps with those who weep, which is affected by everyone's misfortune and which makes us ready to go through the fire to alleviate it or to bear it ourselves....

4th Little virtue: holy joy, which enters into the joy of those who are happy in order to increase it, and which sees to it that our brothers share in all the consolations and all the benefits of virtue and of community life...

5th Little virtue: gentleness of spirit, which, except for very serious reasons, never imposes its opinions on anyone, but willingly adopts whatever is wise and good in other people's ideas, praising their discoveries and their sentiments, and so safeguarding concord and charity...

6th Little Virtue: charitable concern, which anticipates others' needs in order to spare them the pain of feeling them and the humiliation of asking for help; it is the goodness of heart which cannot refuse anything, which is always on the watch to give assistance, to give joy and to oblige everyone...

7th Little Virtue: affability which, without showing the least annoyance, listens even to those who make excessive demands, and is always ready to come to the aid of those who ask for help; it is tireless and patient in instructing the ignorant...

8th Little Virtue: urbanity and politeness, which appeal to everyone by means of gestures of respect, regard and deference, and which always yield the first place in order to give honour to others...

9th Little Virtue: condescendence, which accommodates itself easily to others' wishes, which bends down to make those beneath us feel at ease; which willingly listens to others' reasons and seems to appreciate them even if they are not always well-founded...

10th Little Virtue: devotion to the common good, which prefers the interests of the community, and even of particular members of it, to one's own, and which sacrifices itself for the good of one's brothers and for the prosperity of the community or of society...

11th Little virtue: patience, which keeps silent and endures, always endures, never tiring of doing good, even to the ungrateful. A man aroused is like someone suffering from a fever; the patient man is like a doctor who moderates the fever's attacks, restoring peace to those who have lost it through passion...

12th Little virtue: balance of soul and character. By these we remain always the same, not letting ourselves be drawn away into silliness, passion, irritation, melancholy, ill-humour, but are always kind, cheerful, affable and content with everything and everyone...

The little virtues are social virtues. They are extremely useful for everyone who lives in society alongside other reasonable beings. Without them, the little world we inhabit cannot be well governed, and the communities to which we belong are in constant agitation and upset.

Without the practice of the little virtues, peace cannot exist in the home, and thus people are deprived of the very first consolation in the midst of the thousands of daily trials which life brings in this valley of tears. What a sad house it is where the little virtues are scorned! Superiors and inferiors, young and old, everyone is at loggerheads. Without love and the practice of the little virtues it is impossible for brothers to live in peace under the same roof. Without charity and the practice of the little virtues, a religious house is like a prison, a hell.

Do you want your house to be a paradise, where hearts are in unity? Love the little virtues, practice them faithfully, for they are what make a house happy.

Saint Marcellin Champagnat,
great friend of the Holy Curé of Ars and former fellow-seminarian.