



VIRTUES OF THE MONTH A PATH TO ORDINARY HOLINESS FROM ST. ALPHONSUS

St. Alphonsus considered the moral virtues to be gifts that empower us to shape our conscious behavior according to the law of God as revealed to us by Jesus. In characteristic fashion, Alphonsus proposed a practical plan that could help ordinary people grow in their imitation of Christ-- he recommended the practice of the "virtue of the month." To help people to do this, he highlighted a Christian virtue each month, showing them how to give special attention to that virtue in one's reading, reflection, prayer, and daily faith life.

JANUARY

Virtue

FAITH

Patrons

ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL, APOSTLES

Scriptural Quote

"I am the light of the world" John 8:12

Some thoughts to ponder

Faith is God's first gift to us.

Faith has many facets and definitions, but it is, above all, *our response to the revelation of God.*

God has revealed himself to us in many ways, but the fullness of his revelation is in Jesus Christ (see Heb 1:1-3). Everything about Jesus reveals God to us: his words and works, his signs and miracles, his death and glorious Resurrection.

Suggestions for practicing the virtue of faith during the month

1. Set aside time for enlarging your knowledge of God's revelation. This could be done through reading Scripture or a good spiritual book.
2. Open yourself in prayer to the Holy Spirit.
3. Examine how you are living by faith.

A note from the heart of St. Alphonsus

"It is not enough only to believe all that our holy faith teaches us; we must also direct our lives in accordance with our faith."



Virtue

HOPE

Patrons

ST. ANDREW, APOSTLE

Scriptural Quote

"Your hope is set on me, so I will rescue you, protect you for you know my name. "

Some thoughts to ponder

Hope is centred on God. Through this virtue, we confidently expect the fullness of glory, our eternal destiny, the face-to-face vision of God.

For the early Christians, the anchor was the favorite symbol of hope (see Heb 6:18-19) because it symbolized strength and stability. It reminds us that the stability of our hope comes not from ourselves but rather from our gracious God and our risen Saviour, Jesus Christ.



FEBRUARY

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A note from the heart of St. Alphonsus



Virtue

Patron

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Virtue

Patron

Scriptural Quote

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1.Feature the act of hope in your prayers, saying often during the day: "My God, I place my hope in you."

2. Make a conscious effort to let go of fears and worries that beset you and place your trust in God, whose love and care rule your life.

"The more a person loves God, the more reason he has to hope in Him. This hope produces in the Saints an unutterable peace, which they preserve even in adversity, because as they love God, and know how beautiful He is to those who love Him, they place all their confidence and find all their repose in Him alone."

MARCH

LOVE OF GOD

ST. JAMES THE GREATER, APOSTLE



"You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul and with your whole mind." Matt 22:37

The centerpiece of the spirituality of Saint Alphonsus is the "*love of God*."

Reflecting the teaching of the New Testament, Saint Alphonsus identifies two aspects of this virtue called the love of God: God's great love for us and our love for God in return.

God's love, manifested especially in the gift of his Son Jesus, is freely and generously lavished upon each of us. The central message of Saint Alphonsus is, *Remember how much God loves you!*

During March, constantly ask your-self: "What is the will of God for me today?"

The priceless gift of God's love for us deserves a response of love on our part. But how can we respond to God's love? There are countless ways, but Saint Alphonsus recommends the way of Jesus himself: "I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me" (Jn 6:38).

For us, too, doing the will of our heavenly Father is our way of showing our love for God. This response to God's love must enter the nitty-gritty circumstances of our daily lives.

APRIL

LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR

ST. JOHN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST



"This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. You can have no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends." St John 15: 12-14

On the practical level, Alphonsus provides two positive and two negative considerations for practicing this virtue.

On the positive side, he first encourages the spirit of peace. Though the followers of Jesus Christ, he noted, are from different nations and climes and are of unlike temperament and character, they can live peacefully together, "for love would induce them to practice mutual forbearance."

Second, Alphonsus stresses almsgiving. This refers to the religious duty to help the poor and needy—not only out of our abundance but even, if necessary, out of what we consider essential for ourselves.

On the negative side, he strongly cautions against rash judgment.

"If you desire to practice the beautiful virtue of charity, strive to reject every rash judgment, every distrust and unfounded suspicion of your neighbour."

In addition, he warns against uncharitable speech, for there are many people "who cannot move their tongues with-out wounding someone."

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Some thoughts to ponder

- 1.Focus on how much God loves you.
- 2.Become conscious of your comments about others.

"Why, therefore, must we love our neighbour? Because he or she is loved by God! We must love all whom God loves!"

MAY

POVERTY

ST. THOMAS, APOSTLE

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Mt.5:3

Jesus identified with the poor. (See Mt 25:35-40.) Alphonsus insisted that we can begin to understand gospel poverty only when we begin to experience "the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

This month, why not go through your "*riches*" and choose one treasure to give away. If you find this too difficult, perhaps you can find a way to use that treasure to help another or to bring joy to someone.

Alphonsus' writings and preaching reveal his conviction that gospel poverty (what he calls "*poverty of spirit and a spirit of poverty*") demands *detachment of the heart* from material possessions and worldly power. He encourages us to gain perspective by meditating on death as "*the day of loss*," when riches and possessions will be no more. He used to encourage young Redemptorists to "*clean out their closets*" at the time of retreat so they would not clutter up their lives with extra things.

JUNE

CHASTITY

ST. JAMES THE LESS, APOSTLE

"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." Matt 5:8

This virtue is concerned not only with self-mastery but also with love and holiness.



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1. Take time to reflect on the occasions of sin in your life.

2. Pray for the courage to make changes in your life so you can avoid these occasions of sin.

Alphonsus saw the practice of chastity as another way of striving to do God's will in our lives. He believed that the most subtle dangers regarding chastity were occasions of sin.

In his moral theology, Alphonsus refers to occasions of sin that are *voluntary* (of one's own choosing and therefore avoidable) and *proximate* (those that frequently lead a person to sin). He teaches that even sincere Christians fall into sins against chastity because they voluntarily place themselves into proximate occasions of sin. Likewise, avoiding such occasions is one of the most effective ways of growing in chastity.

JULY

OBEDIENCE

ST. PHILIP, APOSTLE

"You are my friends, if you do things that I command you." Jn 15:14

Obedience is the moral virtue that inclines Christians to submit to the law of God in all its manifestations. God alone is the ultimate source of all law.

Obedience is a positive response not only to civil and ecclesiastical decrees but to the authority of God himself.

Take some time each day to reflect on the specific ways in which this virtue can be manifested in the many components of your life: family, job, neighbourhood, nation.

Alphonsus points out that our obedience to human authority can be less than complete (if that authority opposes the authority of God), but our obedience to God must be complete and absolute. Alphonsus believed that many difficulties of obedience are rooted in false pride. Ask yourself if this is true in your life.



AUGUST

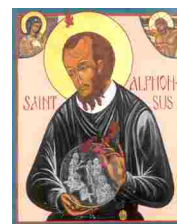
HUMILITY OF HEART

ST. BARTHOLOMEW, APOSTLE

"Learn from Me because I am meek and humble of heart". Mt. 11:29

Christian tradition teaches that one of the most important elements of *humility* is the ability to accept that we are creatures of God, that God is the source of our talents and gifts.

Humility does not demand that we deny our gifts and talents but rather that we acknowledge from where they come.



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Examine your life in light of these questions:

1. Do I really acknowledge my true relationship with God as Creator and Giver of all gifts?
2. Does this have a real impact on my behavior and on my relationship with others?

"He who loves God is not deceived by his own qualities because he knows that whatever he possesses is a gift of God, that without God he possesses only nothingness."

SEPTEMBER

MORTIFICATION

ST. MATTHEW, APOSTLE

"Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

(St. John 12: 25)

Mortification refers to the Christian ideal of dying to self through deliberate restraint of our unruly passions and appetites. It refers to our struggle against evil inclinations.

Reflect on the resentments or dangerous attachments in your life, and pray for the grace to overcome them.

Alphonsus distinguishes between *external* mortification for example, fasting, controlling one's tongue and *internal* mortification "the discipline of the heart," overcoming aversions, resentments, dangerous attachments.

While both kinds of mortification are important, Alphonsus views the internal as both more demanding and more fruitful for spiritual growth.



OCTOBER

RECOLLECTION AND SILENCE

ST. SIMON, APOSTLE

"And when He had dismissed the crowds He went up by Himself to a mountain to pray." (Matt 14: 23)

Recollection is not a specific virtue like humility but rather a stimulus to the practice of all the virtues. Its full title is "*recollection of the presence of God*."

October's virtue is a challenge to seek ways of developing this awareness of God's presence in many different ways, to make it part of the rhythm of daily life. Thus, you might make a list of times in a typical day when a few moments of recollection would make all the difference.

Saint Alphonsus offers this insight: "The more we walk in the presence of God, the better we recognize his beautiful qualities and strengthen his love in our hearts."



NOVEMBER

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PRAYER

ST. THADDEUS, APOSTLE

"Pray continually and never lose heart" Luke 18:1

As the heart pumps life - giving blood to all parts of the body, so *prayer* enlivens the whole Christian life.

Without it, spiritual growth is impossible.

1. Be especially aware of God's presence in the Eucharist and try to make the sacrament the centre of your life.

2. Set aside at least fifteen minutes each day for meditation, opening your mind and heart to God.

Prayer is the heart of the practical plan of spirituality presented by Saint Alphonsus. "For God, Heaven is the human heart."



DECEMBER

LOVE OF THE CROSS

ST. MATTHIAS, APOSTLE

"If anyone comes after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Matt. 16:24

The *cross* is a symbolic term for all human suffering.

As you face the challenge of examining your personal sufferings in light of the sufferings of Christ, pray for the courage to accept these sufferings.

Experience had taught Alphonsus that all people suffer in some way; the question is not *whether* we will suffer, but *how*. Alphonsus discovered that we can respond to the how of suffering by developing a love of the cross—having the spirit of Christ, bearing the cross with gentleness, with cheerfulness, with love.

