

Virtues: Knowing and living out your values

written by Bishop Anthony B. Taylor |

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor delivered this homily June 21.

Every time there is some senseless tragedy like school shootings or mob violence, we are told that these would be less common if parents had good values and succeeded in passing those good values on to their children. But I believe the problem is not values, but rather virtues.

Do you know the difference between values and virtues? It's the difference between knowing and doing. The vast majority of those guilty of wrongdoing know, at least on some level, that what they are doing is wrong — most people are not psychopaths. The problem is usually not with what they know, but rather with what they do.

Strength of character is the ability to do what we know is right, especially when tempted to do otherwise. So if you know what you should do and not do, you've got values. But it is only when you actually live according to those values that you've got virtue.

And what's the main obstacle that keeps us from doing what we know we should do? Weakness of character, the inability to live for anything bigger than ourselves. In today's Gospel Jesus says, "Fear no one." — in other words, be courageous. He continues, "Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known." Thus, one day your strengths and weaknesses of character will be revealed, your virtues and vices ... one day everyone will know who you really are on the inside.

Finally, Jesus adds, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul ... everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father." So, what we do in this life will have eternal consequences.

How do we get this needed strength of character? How do we grow in virtues and thus replace our weaknesses with strengths? Just like with physical strength, so also with strength of character, the key is exercise. As they say, use it or lose it.

You grow in courage by making the effort to act courageously, doing what is right even you know some people will get angry — for instance, calling for getting rid of the Confederate battle flag and statues honoring the Confederacy because these are offensive symbols of oppression that only serve to divide our society and deepen our racial wounds. Remember that the only one you really have to please is the Lord, and if you really are true to him, it will take courage — after all, they didn't crucify Jesus for nothing; they did so in an effort to silence the truth. But in the end, the truth will prevail: The light is stronger than the darkness. And so by embracing the cross, you will grow in the courage necessary to speak unpopular truths.

Other examples: You will grow in kindness by making the effort to be kind, especially to those who are unkind to you; for instance when you voice unpopular truths like the ones I just mentioned. Or your opposition to abortion, or many other moral issues.

The reason why some people get so mad is that deep down they know the truth, and they don't

like it, and so they might vent their anger on you, and you will grow in the virtue of kindness by the effort to remain kind in the face of their anger. You grow in chastity by making the effort to keep proper boundaries on your behavior, especially in this age where pornography is so readily available. And so on. My basic point is that the more you do what is right, the more you turn your values into virtues. And the stronger your character becomes, the easier it will be to live a virtuous life.

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