

Reflection for SOM Learners April 7, 2020

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Revive their Spirit...

A contemporary health care worker on the front lines of the Covid-19 pandemic posited the virtue of fortitude as key to her endurance and fidelity to caring for her patients.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.... The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause. (CCC 1808)

Every deeply committed health care worker knows they are confronted daily with the drama of life and death in today's circumstances. Fortitude, a cardinal virtue in Catholic tradition is indispensable.

Catholic Health Care Workers in particular, but not exclusively, in fact all health care workers, can be encouraged by the witness of Saints throughout the centuries who have selflessly dedicated themselves to caring for the sick who otherwise would receive no treatment.

Saints Cosmas and Damian, 3rd century Syrian physicians and pharmacists, accepted no money for their healing services and bravely endured martyrdom. St. Camillus of Lellis founded the Congregation of the Servants of the Sick and is the patron of hospitals and hospital workers. St. Aloysius Gonzaga, a Jesuit seminarian, died young caring for the sick during an epidemic in Rome in the 16th century. All modeled the virtue of fortitude in their compassionate care for their suffering sisters and brothers. Christians believe they are united with them in the communion of the Saints and share in their victory over death through faith.

In a January 2019 interview in *Psychology Today*, Dr. Daryl Van Tongeren spoke about fostering spiritual fortitude. In terms of reviving health care workers' spirits in the midst of this pandemic, his recommendations are applicable and suitably pastoral.

In response to the question of ways one can cultivate spiritual fortitude when facing hardships, Van Tongeren recommends: (a) committing to a deeper engagement of one's beliefs and practices during adversity, (b) surrounding oneself with a supportive spiritual community, (c) allowing one's spiritual beliefs to be shaped, in part, by the reality of one's hardship, and (d)

embracing the difficult times in life and allowing this pain to help them do the hard work of growth.¹

In addition, caring for health care workers' well-being also mean being present to them in their off hours when you sense they don't want to be alone, mindful of protocols for preventing the spread of any infectious virus.

Van Tongeren's advice to those in difficult circumstances could help foster spiritual fortitude in our health care workers facing the stress of caring for others in this time of pandemic. It can be applied by spouses, friends, other family members or pastoral workers.

- Be practical—sometimes that means just being present.
- Listen well—ask questions and show genuine interest in their experience.
- Support those who doubt and question—this may bear fruit for them and reveal a deep well of spiritual belief they may find accessible to them in their current situation.
- Be reasonable—avoid offering a quick fix or any sort of solution.

Finally, is important for health care workers to know that no one is alone in this crisis. Even if we can't be on the front lines with them, health care workers benefit from knowing we care for them deeply and they are supported by our constant prayers. When it is appropriate, we can share with them our faith that all is in God's hands and ultimately God will bring us through this too.

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-resilience/201901/resilience-and-spiritual-fortitude>