In the year 258 A.D., the Roman emperor, Valerian, ordered the Church to surrender all her treasures to the government. The deacon responsible for the Church's material possessions was a man named Lawrence.

The Roman prefect demanded that Lawrence bring him the treasures of the Church. Lawrence asked for three days.

And three days later, Lawrence returned—not with gold or silver, but with the poor, the sick, the widows, and the orphans of Rome.

Pointing to them, he declared: **"These are the treasures of the Church!"**

The prefect was furious. And Lawrence would ultimately pay for his courage with his life.

But what gave this man such extraordinary courage? Why was he willing to risk everything for people the world considered worthless?

The answer brings us to the virtue we're considering today: **FORTITUDE.**

Over these past several Sundays, we've been exploring the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the virtues that transform us into saints. We've considered prudence, which helps us recognize what is most important, and justice, which moves us to give God and our neighbor what is their due.

But what happens when doing what matters most, becomes difficult? When living justly demands sacrifice?

That's when we need fortitude.

The Catechism teaches that fortitude is the cardinal virtue that gives us firmness in difficulties and constancy in pursuing the good.

And St. Thomas Aquinas makes a fascinating observation: fortitude isn't primarily about attacking difficulties. It's even more about *enduring* them.

Sometimes the greatest courage isn't found in doing something dramatic. It's found in quietly remaining faithful when everything inside us wants to give up.

Now, I witnessed a rather heroic example of this at this year's Bishop's Golf Tournament! Our four-man scramble team was doing pretty well—until, at a certain point, we began to fall apart. Drives were being shanked. Easy putts were being missed. And remember, in a scramble, you have FOUR guys taking the same shot—and somehow, all four of us managed to mess it up!

But we persevered! We endured! We summoned every ounce of patience and fortitude we possessed—and somehow finished 18 holes at seven under par!

Now, I'm not suggesting that our performance deserves recognition in the *Lives of the Saints*. But there is a lesson here:

Fortitude isn't about never failing. It's about refusing to give up when things get difficult.

And in the Christian life, of course, the stakes are infinitely greater than a golf score.

It's the courage to forgive someone who has wounded us. To remain faithful to our marriage when love becomes difficult. To stand up for someone being mistreated, even when everyone else remains silent. To keep praying when God *seems* silent.

Fortitude is the quiet refusal to betray what we know is true, simply because being faithful has become costly.

And that brings us directly to today's readings.

In our first reading, God commands His people not to mistreat the foreigner, the widow, or the orphan. Why? Because these are precisely the people who cannot defend themselves.

And God declares that if they cry out to Him, He will hear them.

But notice something: God doesn't merely ask us to *feel sorry* for the vulnerable. He commands us to defend them.

And that requires courage! Because standing up for someone who cannot repay us, defending someone whom others despise, or protecting innocent human life when society refuses to recognize its dignity—that can cost us something. **[Pause…]**

Now consider our second reading.

St. Paul praises the Thessalonians because they had "turned *to* God, *from* idols, to serve the living and true God."

Think about what that meant! They had abandoned the gods and customs of their surrounding culture. Their conversion wasn't merely a private religious preference. It changed how they lived—and likely cost them friendships, social standing, and security.

Yet Paul says they received the word "in great affliction, [yet] with joy from the Holy Spirit."

Affliction—and joy!

How can those two things coexist?

Because Christian fortitude isn't simply gritting our teeth and enduring suffering. It's the supernatural strength to remain faithful to Someone we love, even in the midst of suffering.

And that brings us to today's Gospel.

A scholar of the Law asks Jesus which commandment is the greatest.

And Jesus answers: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

And then He adds: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Notice: Jesus doesn't give us two competing commandments. He gives us two inseparable expressions of one love.

We cannot truly love God while refusing to love the people He loves.

And we cannot sustain genuine Christian love of neighbor without continually drawing from God's own love.

That's why today's Gospel is so demanding.

Because love isn't simply a warm feeling. Love is the courageous gift of ourselves.

And nowhere do we see that more clearly than on the Cross.

There, Jesus shows us what perfect fortitude looks like. He doesn't flee when love becomes painful. He doesn't abandon us when faithfulness demands everything.

He remains.

Not because He loves suffering, but because **He loves us.**

And this is precisely the kind of love we want to cultivate in our two parishes.

As we begin sharing more about our vision for St. John the Baptist and St. Rose of Lima, you'll hear this beautiful statement of why we exist:

"We exist to spread the Kingdom of God as a home of belonging, of healing, and of transformation."

But brothers and sisters, that vision requires fortitude!

It takes courage to welcome someone who feels they don't belong. Courage to reach out to someone who has fallen away from the Church. Courage to accompany a wounded person through the long, difficult process of healing. Courage to surrender our own preferences so that others might encounter Jesus Christ.

And above all, it takes courage to become holy ourselves.

Remember St. Lawrence?

He recognized the poor and vulnerable as the Church's treasures because he had learned to see them through the eyes of Christ.

And he could courageously give his life for Christ because he had first learned to give his life *to* Christ.

- Today, as we approach this altar, we encounter that same Lord who loved us to the very end.
- Here, in the Eucharist, Jesus gives us not merely an example of courageous love, but **His very own life—the strength to love as He loves.**
- So let us ask Him today: Lord, where am I allowing fear to keep me from loving? Where am I choosing comfort over faithfulness? Where are You asking me to be courageous?
- And then, receiving Him in Holy Communion, let us ask for the fortitude to respond.
- Because, brothers and sisters, **the measure of Christian courage is not how much we are willing to fight, but how much we are willing to love—even when love costs us everything.**