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Mother Teresa is credited with saying, “Some people come into your life as blessings. Some come into your life as lessons.” In preparing to write this week’s article, I realized that too often I am not just a “lesson,” but I am probably closer to being a warning label! I take comfort from knowing that God quite often does some of His best work through those whom we would deem among the worst sinners. Noah was a drunkard. Rahab was a prostitute. David not only committed adultery, he committed murder to cover up his sin. There is also Matthew, a tax collector, likely dishonest and a thief. Martha worried about everything. Jonah tried to run from God. Peter denied Christ. And the person most commonly thought of as unlikely to do great things for God is Saul. Saul, who we now know as St. Paul, transformed his life and wrote several books of the New Testament. I am certainly not claiming to be on the road that these greats travelled, however, I do see myself in much the same spot as they once were.

I’ve written over the past few weeks about how often and easily we convince ourselves that we’re not “that bad.” Yes, our sins are always forgivable, but we are to strive to not commit them to begin with. In reviewing the Cardinal and Theological Virtues, the topics of learning during our December Faith Formation classes, I realized that I don’t have any stories to relate to help you see how ordinary folk like me can exemplify these traits. As I said, I can only stand as a warning label.

The four Cardinal Virtues are prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. Prudence “gives clarity through reason to know the truth and good in every circumstance, and helps us choose the right way to act in every circumstance. It allows us to know good based on an eternal perspective.” Prudence is what would help me reign in my tendencies to speed while driving, over eat, spend money foolishly, and desire those things which I merely want, not need. I certainly don’t employ prudence in many of my decisions and actions. Justice is “the virtue that helps us give God and neighbor their due; to adore and obey God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.” If I was to embody justice I’d probably have protested outside an abortion clinic or fought against some environmental wrong-doing. I would be better about remembering to say my daily prayers and to allow God into my life in more ways. I would be better at supporting charities that work to serve the marginalized. I can’t claim to be a role model in any of those ways. Temperance is what “allows us to live our lives in moderation so that we are not enslaved to our passions.” I spend way too much time on the Internet and playing on my phone. I waste time watching tv. I don’t allow the suggested serving size dictate how many Oreos I might eat in any given setting. Thanksgiving ranks among my favorite holidays not necessarily because of the opportunity to express my gratitude for all my blessings. Temperance is not a virtue I would use to describe myself. Fortitude “gives us strength against temptation and helps us overcome fear in order to persevere in living a moral life.” I’ve already disclosed my weakness against the temptations of speeding, overeating, and misusing my time, as well as my lack of generosity and compassion. You will not find my picture next to the word fortitude in any reference book.

I guess that the realization of where I really am and the desire to want to be better is as good a starting place as any. Please pray for me. Pray that I may ever yearn to be more Christ-like. Pray that I be strengthened in these Cardinal Virtues so that I may one day stand as a blessing, not just a lesson. I pray that you, too, will honestly examine your life. I hope that you find yourself in better standing than I did, but if not, that’s okay. Join me as we grow to become better people.

Join us at Faith Formation every Sunday in Fellowship Hall from noon- 2 pm as we learn more about our faith and how to live it in today’s world.

Blessings,

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