

“In everything God works for the good of those who love him.” (Romans 8:28)

Omnia bonum: All things for good.

The Little Virtues of St. Francis de Sales

1) Forbearance

This virtue excuses, minimizes and even pardons other peoples faults very readily, even if one cannot be sure of receiving similar pardon oneself.

“Brother, I am determined to love you forever, no matter what you may do to me, and even if you do not love me. So I will become attached to you, even in spite of you. If you insult me, I will be patient; I will bow my head in the face of insults; I will conquer your bad conduct with my kindness; I will reach out to those who refuse my help; I will do good to the ungrateful; I will honor those who despise me; for we are all members of one another.” (St. Bernard)

2) Charitable Concealment

This second virtue appears not to notice our neighbor’s defects, wrongs, mistakes and inappropriate words, and which puts up with everything without saying a word or complaining. Most of the time, it is not our job to correct; our duty is only to bear up. How easy it is for a man of good sense and virtue to put up with such weaknesses in such souls!

“Conceal the defects of your brothers and put up with them.” (St. Paul)

3) Compassion

This third little virtue takes on the sufferings of those who suffer in order to lessen them, weep with those who weep, share everyone’s misfortunes, and does it’s utmost to relieve them or to bear them himself.

“I became all things to all men.” (St. Paul)

4) Holy Cheerfulness

The fourth virtue is that which takes on even the joys of those who are happy in order to increase them, to obtain for one’s brothers every consolation and all the happiness which flows from virtue and from community life. “My brothers and sisters, I feel for all your sufferings, I share all your joys. I am sick with the sick; my love for you makes me feel all your pains, as well as all your joys.” (St. Cyprian)

5) Open Mind

This virtue never imposes its opinions on anyone, but readily accepts whatever is good and judicious in a brother’s ideas, and applauds his discoveries and feelings without jealousy, in order to preserve unity and fraternal charity. It is the renunciation, easily granted, of one’s own opinions and the antithesis of all stubbornness and intransigence in one’s ideas. Express your opinion to keep the conversation going, but then let it stand on its own without defending it. St. Elias says that in that sort of battle, the winner is the one who gives in, because he has more virtue than the others. St. Ephrem avers that he always gave in discussions for the sake of the general peace. “There is to be no wrangling in words” (Holy Spirit (2 Tim 2:14)) “An ounce of charity is worth more than a hundred pounds of correctness.” (St. Robert Bellarmine) “Those who want peace should never contradict anyone.” (St. Joseph Calasanctius)

6) Charitable Solitude

This sixth little virtue is that which foresees others’ needs in order to spare them the pain of feeling them and the humiliation of asking for help. It is goodness of heart which does not know how to say no, which is always alert to be of service, to give pleasure and to oblige everyone. A good way to practice this is to strive to perform the most humble and difficult tasks in order to better serve your brother.

7) **Affability**

The seventh virtue is that which listens to unreasonable people without showing the least annoyance, which is always ready to come to the help of those who request it, which instructs the ignorant without growing weary and with great patience. St. Vincent de Paul offers a rare example of this virtue. He was known to cut short a conversation he was having with some wealthy person in order to repeat something for the fifth time to a person who couldn't understand, and he said it the last time as calmly as the first. He was known to listen without the least trace of impatience to poor people who spoke hesitantly and endlessly. Though he was so overwhelmed with work he was known to let himself be interrupted thirty times a day by scrupulous people who simply repeated the same thing over and over again in different words, to hear them out with admirable patience, to write out sometimes for them in his own hand what he had said to them, to explain it to them in greater detail if they did not understand it too well, and finally, to interrupt his recitation of his breviary and his sleep in order to be of service to his neighbor.

8) **Urbanity And Politeness**

This virtue tends to show everyone signs of respect, consideration, and deference, and always yields the first place in order to show honor to others. Deference shown with sincerity maintains mutual love, just as oil feeds the flame of a lamp which produces light. Without it there is no unity or fraternal charity. Do not mistreat anyone, do not be lacking in esteem for anyone, and beware of showing contempt for a single one of your brothers or of treating him harshly because of his defects. Do you make fun of your hand or foot because it has a sore or is misshapen or dirty? Don't you on the contrary, take even better care of it? Don't you treat it more gently than if it were well?

"Have a profound respect for one another" (St. Paul (Rom 12:10)). "Love and you will be loved; praise others and you will be praised; respect them and they will respect you; give in to the readily, and they will show you all sorts of deference." (St. John Chrysostom)

9) **Condescension** readily adapts itself to other people's wishes, is flexible enough to please those who are under our authority, readily listens to others' opinions and appears to enjoy them even though they may not always be well-founded. "To possess condescension, means to accommodate everyone, to the extent that the law of God and right reason permit. It is to be like a ball of warm wax, capable of taking any shape, so long as it is good; it is not seeking one's own interests but those of our neighbor and the glory of God. Condescension is the daughter of charity, and one must be very careful not to mistake it for a certain weakness of character which prevents one from reprimanding our neighbor for his faults when we are obliged to; that would not be an act of virtue, but on the contrary, participation in another's sin." (St. Francis de Sales)

10) **Dedication To The Common Good:** The tenth is that which leads us to prefer the interests of the community and even those of individuals, to our own, and which sacrifices oneself for the sake of one's brothers and the prosperity of the community.

11) **Patience** This eleventh little virtue keeps silent, always puts up with things, and never stops doing good, even to ungrateful people. Abbot St. Eucherius was so patient that he pushed this virtue to the point of thanking those who made him suffer. The quick-tempered man is like someone with a fever; the patient man, like a doctor who relieves a fever and restores happiness and peace to those who have lost them through their anger. Put up patiently with the imperfections, defects and annoying behavior of your neighbor; that is the real way to be at peace and to preserve unity with everyone.

"If you saw someone jump into the river, would it make any sense for you to jump in yourself just because he had done so?" (St. Bonaventure)

12) **Equanimity Of Soul And Character**

This twelfth and final little virtue of St. Francis de Sales guarantees that we will always be the same, and never give way to giddiness, impatience, boredom, melancholy or bad humor, but always be gentle, gay, affable and satisfied with everyone.

6 Motives to Practice the 12 Little Virtues

1) Our Neighbor's Weakness

Yes, all men are weak, which is why they have so many defects. Everyone has his weak spot; everyone is subject to many little defects or imperfections. Some examples of these defects are suspiciousness, oversensitivity, being overwhelmed or discouraged easily and even explosive tempers: all of which must be put up with and which provide many opportunities to practice the little virtues. It is only just and reasonable to take care of anything which is weak; so we must put up with all the weaknesses of our neighbor.

2) The Lightness Of The Defects

Most of the time, if we take things in good part, most of what we have to put up with in our confreres are only imperfections, quirks of character, and weakness which in no way prevent the persons who are subject to them from being elite souls, richly endowed, with solid virtues and a timorous conscience. How easy it is for a man of good sense and virtue to put up with such weaknesses in such souls!

3) The third motive flows not only from the lack of gravity of the faults in question but often even from the absence of any fault.

Therefore one should put up with things in our neighbor which are indifferent in themselves and which cannot be called defects. Among them are their looks, their build, their tone of voice, their posture, physical or moral weaknesses which displease us, etc. here again we encounter the diversity of characters and their difference from our own. Reason and virtue demand that we live in peace in the midst of this natural diversity, and that we adapt to others' moods with flexibility, patience and condescension. To become upset over this diversity of characters would make no more sense than to be angry because someone else likes a type of food, fruit or candy which are not to our own taste.

4) We All Need To Be Put Up With

There is no one so wise and accomplished that he can do without others' indulgence. Today, I will have to put up patiently with someone else; tomorrow, he or somebody else will have to put up with me. Will you say that you have no defects and that there is nothing in you which could possibly displease your neighbor? How unjust it would be to demand respect and consideration from others and to respond to it with rudeness and pride!

5) The Bonds Which Unite Us To Those Whom We Must Put Up With

The individuals whom we must put up with are our brothers in Jesus Christ. We are all sons of the same mother. "Can our divine Mother remain indifferent to the fact that we harbor in our hearts some sentiments of bitterness or even antipathy against one of our brothers, whom she perhaps loves more than she does us? I beg you, do not cause that pain and that sorrow in her motherly heart." Moreover, the persons we must put up with are the friends of Jesus Christ; they share in our vocation, they belong to the same family we do and work for the same goals; they are our helpers in a common task and our collaborators in a common ministry. How many reasons that give us for loving them, being of service to them, and putting up with them with total patience!

6) The Intrinsic Excellence Of These Little Virtues

They are little only because they refer to things which are small in themselves: a word, an act, a look, an expression of politeness; but if you examine the principle in which they are rooted and the end towards which they tend, they are very great. For a good religious, the practice of the little virtues is a continual exercise of charity towards his neighbor; and since charity is the first and most excellent of all virtues, the habitual practice of the little virtues produces solidly virtuous men. That should be enough to make us *love* them and to make the practice of them dear and easy for us.