

VII. Reserve

Reserve is a virtue which makes us think, speak, and act with moderation, discretion, and modesty.

It differs from patience. Both, in truth, must be accompanied by modesty; but the former does so in order to forestall evil, while the latter does so to endure it. Reserve differs from the aspect of prudence named precaution, because it directly forestalls evil, either within itself, or outwardly; whereas precaution does so directly or exteriorly.

Finally, this virtue differs from gravity. This latter's principal object lies in the exterior, but reserve's essential object is not only what is external but also what is internal.

By this we understand in general that reserve is distinguished from precaution and gravity as a cause is distinguished from its effects, as a spring differs from the rills flowing from it. But, at the same time, we can understand how the virtues of a good teacher, although differing from one another, are yet so intimately united that they hold together as though by indissoluble bonds, so that one cannot fail in regard to one without often failing against several others.

Reserve, then, consists in controlling ourselves in circumstances where we might grow angry or upset; in not allowing ourselves anything not entirely proper and beyond the reach of any just criticism or evil suspicion. It teaches us to regulate all our conduct so that the student may not remark anything not imitable and edifying in us. It requires us to act everywhere with due consideration for the concerns, the understanding, and the precautions demanded by the innocence of the children, the weakness of their age, their impressionability, and their tendency to imitate evil. A word, a gesture, a smile, a wink, something insignificant in appearance, can call into play their imagination, becoming for them a fruitful source of reveries, a rich fount of unjustified conclusions, and sometimes of dangerous moral decisions in the future.

This virtue also avoids all dangerous friendships or relationships with them. It forbids us even to touch or caress them, to joke with them, to let them hug us. It never loses sight of the opinion usually entertained by children, that persons consecrated to God must be without defects and above the ordinary weakness found in other persons. We must do nothing to disabuse them of this opinion, and should also remember that among these children there may be some sufficiently perverse to give the most malignant interpretations to words and actions in which only the malice of an already corrupted heart would discern the appearance of evil, when none is present.

As reserve in thought leads to reserve in word and action, it is very important to learn how to think properly, that is, to reflect carefully on things, as well as to judge rightly of them.

We fail against reserve when we do not seek to give good example, to show decorum in all our external conduct, to avoid every offensive or coarse manner of acting, whatever would be the result of a poor education, whatever might in the slightest degree offend the eyes or the ears of the young, or give rise to rash judgments, or lessen the consideration and the reputation a teacher needs in order to do any good and to deserve the esteem and confidence of his students. In fact, they lose respect and submission to him the moment they see that his conduct is not irreproachable.

Another effect of reserve as of gravity, is to impress the students, to make them very reserved also, and to prevent them from taking liberties; for various virtues can produce the same effects because of differing principles.

“Apply yourself with all possible care to watch over your heart, for it is the source of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)

“Make straight the path wherein you wish to walk, and all your attempts will be favored.” (Proverbs 4:26).

“Set a watch upon your lips; melt down your gold and silver, and make a balance to weigh your words and a firm bridle for your tongue.” (Eccl. 28:29).