

An ethics professor recently asked his students to name the qualities that make a person virtuous. The students came up with honesty, integrity, reliability and compassion. The professor said, "You're missing one." They named some more: commitment, modesty, selflessness. This still didn't satisfy the professor. He said the quality he was waiting to hear was courage. You can have all the other virtues, but without courage you will not use them.

Today's first reading shows the courage of the apostles. Peter had just cured a lame man in the name of Jesus and had preached about the resurrection. The leaders and elders did not approve this message, so they accosted Peter and John, locked them up and interrogated them the next morning. Meanwhile, the number of believers grew to 5000. The leaders said, "We want to know by what power and in whose name you cured the lame man." Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, responded with the words of today's first reading. He said they worked this miracle in the name of Jesus, whom the leaders had crucified, and whom God had raised from the dead. There wasn't much the leaders could do or say. The cured man was standing right there. Peter and John went back out and preached again until they were arrested and jailed once more. These men believed in Christ, but they also had the courage to speak about him.

When Jesus was arrested, he said virtually nothing. But when Peter and John were arrested, it was hard to shut them up. The authorities were surprised at the courage of these men who otherwise seemed uneducated.

Where did that courage come from? Marvelous things had happened to Peter and John: the Holy Spirit had come upon them at Pentecost. They had raised a cripple to health. They discovered a skill for preaching, and thousands believed their word. They got their courage by recognizing the power of God in their hearts and hands.

We need courage to speak up for the downtrodden, to correct a wrong, and to share our faith. God gives us courage by doing marvelous things for us: answering a prayer, granting us blessings, and freeing us from fear, doubt and sin. Any Christian can act with courage when we recognize the power of God in our hearts and hands.