

Can I Lose My Dignity? My Life?



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and have it more abundantly.”**

Jn 10:10

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In 1593, Cesare Ripa published *Iconology*, a collection of images that seek to serve poets, painters and sculptors in their representations of virtues, vices, feelings and human passions. It is an encyclopedia, presented in alphabetical order, with images such as peace, freedom or prudence, recognizable by their attributes and symbolic colors.

In this book the image of **DIGNITY** appears. It is described as a beautifully adorned woman carrying a large, heavy box on her shoulders. Her back is curved due to the weight of the box, but she is standing up straight.

The box is heavy because it's full of gold and precious stones.

1 Why do you think that dignity was represented in this way?

Does the box that she's carrying seem like a heavy burden?

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How would you describe the woman's stance?

Why doesn't she let go of the burden she is carrying?

The word "dignity" comes from the Latin *dignitas*.

Dignity is the characteristic of worthiness and it indicates that someone is deserving of something. Dignity is quality.

The quality "dignified" derives from the Latin 'digno' and can be translated as *valuable*. It is a value inherent to human beings.

2 In this frame, try to represent the concept of DIGNITY by drawing an image from this century.



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3 Read the following story:

Once upon a time there was a rich and powerful king, endowed with great intelligence, and even greater pride. His pride was so great that no one seemed to be a worthy enough rival to enjoy his favorite hobby, chess. He sent word that he would give a tenth of his riches to whoever could prove that they had sufficient dignity to rival him in the game. In exchange, if the king did not consider them worthy, they would be immediately decapitated.

Many risked their lives challenging the king's pride. Both rich and poor, inept and intelligent challenged him, but the king always found them unworthy, since either they were unwise players, or they couldn't compete with his power. Over time, all of his reckless rivals disappeared, and the king felt satisfied that no one in the land was worthy of facing him.



Years later, a poor beggar approached the palace with the intention of playing against the king. The words of those who crossed his path, trying to help him evade certain death, were useless. He was able to reach the king who, upon seeing his ragged appearance, couldn't believe that the man could have possibly thought he could rival him in dignity.

- "What made you think that you are worthy of facing me, you slave?" said the king, irritated, calling for the executioner.
- "That I forgive what you are going to do. Would you be capable of doing this?", the beggar calmly responded.

The king remained paralyzed. He had never expected anything like this, and the more he thought about it, the more sense the man's words made. If he were to condemn him to death, the beggar would be right, and he would be more dignified than the king on account of his capacity to forgive; but if he didn't execute him, he would have retained his life, and everyone would know that he was a worthy adversary...Without having moved a single piece, he knew that he had lost the game.

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“How is it possible that you’ve defeated me without even playing? Whether I play with you or not, everyone will see my unworthiness,” the king said, disheartened.

“You are mistaken, my Lord. Your infamy is already known by all, for it is not people who are unworthy, but their works. For years you have demonstrated with your actions how infamous and unjust you have become trying to play the dignity of men according to your whims”.

The king understood his disgrace and, repentant of his crimes and his pride, looked the beggar in the eyes. He saw such great wisdom and dignity in them that, without saying a word, he handed over his crown and, giving him his clothes, turned him into the king. Wrapped in the man’s rags, and with his eyes full of tears, his final order as king was to be imprisoned forever in the deepest dungeon, as payment for all his injustices. But the new king showed himself to be so just and so wise, that only a few years later he liberated the previous king from his punishment, and since his sincere repentance proved the best accompaniment to his great intelligence, from his hands came the greatest laws in the forgiving kingdom.

Pedro Pablo Sacristán

4 In relation to this sentence from the story: “*for it is not people who are unworthy, but their works*”, think about the following questions:

Do you think that people's dignity can be eliminated?

Who gives us DIGNITY?

Who is UNWORTHY: the person or their actions?

What determines whether actions are dignified or not?

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My dignity is "being worthy of..." My dignity is rooted in my creation. This means that Someone has conferred this dignity on me.

My DIGNITY is being a child of God. Created in the image and likeness of God. And this dignity is innate, inherent in my person.

My reason and freedom are also inherent, and they put my actions, which can either build me up or destroy me, into play.

I can have two attitudes in front of my DIGNITY:

- Recognize that I am DIGNIFIED and VALUABLE because of who I am, setting my gaze on the One who has given me this DIGNITY.
- Choose those DIGNIFIED and valuable acts that correspond to my true DIGNITY, bringing my reason, my will and my freedom into play, and recognizing my need to cleave to Him who makes me truly DIGNIFIED.



5 Many times we aren't aware of this.

Do I see that I am "worthy" or "valuable" for my Creator? Do I recognize this dignity in me? What about in other people?

Am I aware of those acts that lead me away from truly being a PERSON, that lead me away from my dignity?

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6 Now, we invite you to watch this montage of the song *Everything* by Lifehouse.

Lyrics:

Find me here speak to me
I want to feel you, I need to hear you .

You are the light that's leading me,
To the place where I find peace again .

You are the strength that keeps me walking
You are the hope that keeps me trusting.

You are the life to my soul
You are my purpose. You are everything.

And how can I stand here with you
And not be moved by you? Would you tell me,
How could it be any better than this?

You calm the storms, you give me rest;
You hold me in your hands, you won't let me fall.

You still my heart and you take my breath away.
Would you take me in,
Would you take me deeper now?

And how can I stand here with you ...

Cause you're all I want, you are all I need,
You are everything. Everything .

You are all I want, you are all I need,
You are everything. Everything .

And how can I Stand here with you...



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyheJ480LYA>



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Share your answers to the following questions with your classmates:

What most caught your attention about the way the song was acted out?

Where can you observe self-giving and generosity being compared to seduction?

What elements of seduction are used?

What effects are produced in the main character? Where does she feel peace and happiness? Where does she feel despair?

Is the main character alone? Is someone watching out for her?

At what moment is she embraced?

After seeing this video, do you believe that it is possible to lose our dignity? Can we lose our life while we are still living?

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7 Give concrete examples of things that lead you away from your **DIGNITY**:

When I use my body wrongly...	
When I don't appreciate the value of life...	
When I don't respect others...	
When I don't value myself...	
...	
...	

8 Now, we will look at a testimonial entitled, "*Diary of An Alcoholic Girl*" published on elmundo.es (11-19-2007).

"I started drinking alcohol when I was 15, but my first contact with drugs was through joints and tablets. **One day I went to the BCM, I tried ecstasy tablets, I stole the ecstasy tablets and I loved them.** From that point on, tablets turned into an obsession for me and I only lived thinking about consuming them. Up until then I was a happy girl. I got along amazingly well with my parents, I lived surrounded by care and comfort,

I didn't have any problems. I started to do drugs for stupid reasons, to make me look important in front of my classmates and to believe I was the funniest one in school, the craziest, the one who went to the BCM while others stayed home.

It made me feel superior. I tried cocaine, too, but I didn't have enough money, and so I turned to 'tranquimazin', which I could buy in Chinatown for a dollar, and I would mix them with joints.

I would be stoned all day, but I didn't realize it.

I thought that my life was completely normal.

I dropped out of high school and started to study hairstyling, but without quitting the 'tranquimazin' or the joints. They quickly stopped having an effect, and so I started to drink alcohol.



Laura, from the back, Projecte Jove.
(Foto: Jordi Avellà)

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I would to go the supermarket and buy anything: a nisetete, beer, wine – as long as it got me drunk it didn't matter. I would get up in the morning and start drinking.



I started working as a bartender, and that was really my downfall because I could drink for free all day long. I was so drunk that they ended up firing me, but I found another bartending job. This went on until I was 19. **I got my driver's license, and within 15 days I got in an accident.** I crashed into a couple of cars, but fortunately no one was injured. I was driving totally wasted and they put me in jail. That was when my mother realized that I had a problem with alcoholism, because up till that moment I was an apparently normal girl who studied and worked.

I covered up the effects of the alcohol with 'tranquimazin' and looked just fine. I didn't leave the house for 3 months. My mother told me, 'You can't continue on like this. You're grounded'. I spent 3 months without leaving the house and I felt like I was going crazy. I couldn't get high with cocaine or joints or 'tranquimazin', so I grabbed onto alcohol. **I spent every day drunk, because it was the only thing that would give me a high.** My parents couldn't watch me all day long and when they weren't home I would go to the grocery store and for \$4 I could buy a ton of liters. I would drink them hot because the high was bigger. I didn't care whether I liked it or not; the thing was I had to get high, because if I didn't drink I couldn't live. I would get hysterical and beat my head against the wall. And then I wouldn't stop drinking till I dropped to the floor. The next day I couldn't remember anything. I would wake up with a terrible hangover, throwing up and with just one thing on my mind: drinking again. My parents couldn't keep me locked up forever, so I got another job as a bartender. I stopped cocaine because at that point I just liked alcohol. I only liked thinking about drinking, in a desperate way. **Then I would go back home, falling down on the floor, with ripped tights, no shoes, broken high heels, with my skirt who knows where, super drunk, throwing up.** Anyone could have taken advantage of me, raped me. The next day you feel really badly about yourself: 'What are you doing?', so you drink so more to get rid of that feeling. Like this all the time, drunk every day. The worst thing is that I'm saying all this while I'm sitting here drinking a beer. I have spent 9 hours in a coma because of alcohol. I have had hallucinations, and I still have them. I have had memory loss. My skin got all messed up, I got acne, I gained a ton of weight, my whole body was bloated. My eyes were always red, droopy, always sad-looking.

I didn't know about the risks of alcohol. I would tell myself, 'Man! But it's legal, you can drink, everyone drinks'. I thought I was better than everyone because I only drank alcohol and I didn't abuse pills. Young people don't know what alcohol is at all. They don't think you can get hooked.

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There are a lot of young people that do cocaine after they drink to reduce the effect so it won't be noticeable. And then they get hooked on cocaine. I don't know which is worse. Alcohol is disastrous and shameful, it ruins your life. If I didn't drink, I would have a lot of things: my driver's license, which they are going to take away; two cars; a ton of money; self-esteem; confidence in myself. I bought another car, and that time it lasted a month. I crashed into a tree, drunk. And I spent two more nights in jail. But I continued without wanting to realize that I had a problem with alcohol. I didn't realize it until 4 months later. And it's very sad.

I've participated in Project Jove for one year and five months. I started because I had to do something with my life. I was losing everything. They kicked me out of my house. My mother told me, 'This is the point we've gotten to. If you don't go into rehab I don't want you in this house.' Imagine how desperate my mother was for her to reach the point of kicking me out of the house. **I spent a few days on the street, not knowing where to go.** My dad called my whole family to tell them not to let me in their houses, even if it was very hard for them, because he wanted me to be on the street and find out what kind of life was waiting for me if I turned into a drunk who sleeps on top of some cardboard on a bench. I saw myself sprawled through the neighborhood, totally drunk, terrible. I had lost everything. I've experienced a lot of setbacks since I've been in the Project. Alcohol withdrawal is the worst there is – the only one that can kill you. Every month I fell back until I got so fed up with myself that I said: 'That's enough, darn it! I'm going to turn 22 and I've been drinking since I was 15. **I've lost out on the best things in my adolescence and I don't want to throw away the rest of my life.**' Therapy wasn't enough for me, and so I asked the doctor to prescribe me Disulfiram, which is a medication that acts as an inhibitor to drinking habits. If I take the pill and then drink, even if it's just one drop of alcohol, it makes me have an allergic reaction: my hands sweat, I have heart palpitations and throw up; I could fall into a coma or even die. It's a really hard-core treatment, but I keep doing it to protect me, because it's the only way that I can stop drinking. **It's been six months since I've been taking the medicine every day, and since then I haven't drank anything.** Even though I will conclude my treatment in November, I want to extend it because Christmas will come and I don't trust myself.

I am aware that I will never be able to drink alcohol again. I have to abstain completely, because you never lose the urge to drink. Since I've stopped drinking I'm not the same person anymore. I've gone back to school, I got my degree in massage therapy and I started working in a beauty salon. My relationship with my family as changed 100%. I had totally lost my relationship with my father. **We lived in the same house, but we didn't even look at each other.** Now my dad worries about me, he asks me if I need anything, he gives me money, and he asks, 'Did you eat? Have you had dinner?'. He works at night and when he gets home I can hear him ask my mother, 'Did Laura get home okay yesterday? What time did she get home? Was she high?' No. My mother tells me, 'Princess, I am proud of you, and so is your dad'. These words give me the strength to keep going. **Seeing that my mother was depressed and now is happy is what fills me."**

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8 In small groups, discuss what struck you the most about this testimonial. Reflect on the following portions of the text:

“...up until then I was a happy girl...”

Where is our happiness rooted? In our wellbeing, pleasure, in instant gratification? Or in truly responding to our dignity as persons?

“...I started to do drugs for stupid reasons, to make me look important...”

Are we aware of the magnitude of our actions? Do we know that our actions have consequences?

“...if I wasn't drinking, I couldn't live...”

Sometimes things, or even people, can enslave us. Can something that makes us feel good get to the point that it enslaves us? Make a list of things close to you that can get to the point that they enslave you:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

“...the next day you feel bad about yourself...”

Does this emptiness and solitude that we sometimes feel speak to us about our dignity?

“...I didn't know about the risks of alcohol...”

How many things do we accept without understanding them? Do we always put our trust in the right people?

“...alcohol ruins your life...”

Do addictions destroy you? What other things can ruin your life?

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"...I was losing everything..."

What do we lose out on when we don't act according to our dignity?

"...I don't have self-confidence..."

Are insecurity, low self-esteem and fear the consequences of distancing ourselves from our dignity? What other consequences do we experience?



To lose my dignity is to cease to be what I am, a PERSON.

To lose my dignity is to fail to respond to the wonderful Value that I have as a child of God, loved by God.

If I am not attentive and I don't open my eyes to the call of the One who gives me true DIGNITY, it is very easy to fall into what the world offers me in such an attractive way. It tangles me up in its web and it's very difficult to get out.

But there is always a good news, ALWAYS! Just like the image of *Everything*, there is Someone who is always watching over me, always waiting for me with open arms, and always desiring to love me. And to give me life in abundance.

I am who I choose. I am the one who searches, who is called to respond. Who do I want to embrace?



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BUILDING UP LOVE



