

Life-Changing Classics, Volume XXXII

# THE 7 LEADERSHIP VIRTUES OF JOAN OF ARC



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# The Seven Leadership Virtues of Joan of Arc

By  
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## Introduction

An objective measure of how fully the 15<sup>th</sup> century maiden named Joan of Arc has captured the imagination of the world may be found in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. According to one biographer (Mary Gordon) there are more than 20,000 books about Joan of Arc in that library alone. The sheer number of works about a medieval teenager defies imagination but speaks, pardon the pun, *volumes* about her singular contribution to human history.

The curmudgeonly Mark Twain was enamored of Joan. So great was his esteem for her life and accomplishments that he once said that it took six thousand years to produce a Joan of Arc, and the world would need another 50,000 before anyone of her stature would ever appear again. That is high praise from a man who did not dole out compliments lightly.

So, we must begin our small contribution to the *Life-Changing Classics* Series with a very humble declaration: we cannot possibly do justice to Joan of Arc's life in these few pages!

Our scope will be more narrowly focused on the one dimension of her life and character that had the greatest impact on the world: her leadership skills. Joan was not a politician, although she worked with many of the key political leaders of her day. She made no contributions to culture, although European culture was tremendously enriched by her exploits. Joan of Arc was unabashedly a military leader of the French people as they took back their country from an invading army. She claimed no title except that of Maid (which we will explain in Chapter 2).

Fine leadership skills are a rare gift, and it is unlikely that anyone is truly *born* a leader. Many people become good leaders through training. But others, like Joan of Arc, have a certain God-given *charism* of leadership that enhances their natural skills for leading men and nations. Their human formation, character, and circumstances add the rest. History has seen its share of great leaders, and Joan of Arc, who did such extraordinary things in such a short period of time, takes her place among them in one of the fullest expressions of excellent leadership in history.

It is amazing to think that this world class leader had not yet reached the age of twenty when she poured out her leadership gifts on her countrymen. The entirety of her "career" lasted less than a single calendar year.

By depicting in a few words and images the astonishing leadership virtues of Joan of Arc, we can only present seven inadequate snapshots of a life fully lived. We cannot go into much detail about her personal or family history, her extraordinary spiritual gifts, or even the shocking way in which her life was cut short by the traitorous leaders of her day. I have placed a short list of superb resources for further reading at the back of this book and, of course, there are at least 20,000 others out there for your edification!

As a necessary preliminary to the reflections that follow, it will be helpful to see Joan of Arc's life at a glance through a timeline that will provide a few basic historical details, names, and terms that the reader may find referenced in the pages to come. It is only a schematic outline consisting of twelve points whose purpose is to give a wide view of the vast and beautiful panorama of one of the greatest lives ever lived.

My prayer is that the reader may be encouraged by the seven cameos of Joan of Arc, the leader, presented in these pages and be fortified by the example of her virtues in whatever capacity one is called to exercise leadership in the modern world.

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## 1

### The Angel

#### **Virtue: Spirit.**

An angel is a purely spiritual being. There is nothing of flesh or matter in him. He does not live in the world but visits to communicate the divine will in special ways to God's servants. Every biblical account of an angel depicts a being who adopted human form for a specific mission but who does not live in time and space naturally as human beings do. The archangel Raphael made this theological point clear to Tobias when he explained that it only *looked like* he was eating human food (Tobit 12:19)!

An angel was sent by God to Joan of Arc when she was thirteen or fourteen years old, and that encounter put the seal of a spiritual mission on her. According to Joan's own account, Michael the Archangel himself came to her when she was at prayer in the front garden of her family home. He was accompanied by a host of heavenly companions, and they were bathed in spiritual light. St. Michael didn't even take on human form for this encounter but appeared directly to her soul and senses in a vision.

Joan was unable to explain more than a few words about the encounter, as often happens when people see heavenly beings. As a *mystical* experience such encounters often escape description in words. However, when she was asked by one of her inquisitors if the glorious archangel had *hair and clothes* Joan burst into a fury. Her response to the rather silly question (from a cleric who should have known better) was the exasperation of a saint: “Do you think that God cannot clothe His own angels?!” That answer discouraged any further questioning about Joan’s angels.

But the angel came with a purpose, and that was something Joan could explain to her questioners. In fact, she was very open about explaining the mission she was given by the archangel. It was this: *she was chosen to drive the English out of France and crown the king.*

### **Spiritual Formation**

Joan’s encounter with an angel brings us to the question of the spiritual formation of a leader. It is an essential dimension of Christian leadership, which is why it appears first on the list of virtues enumerated in this book. Let us acknowledge three notable characteristics of Joan’s spiritual formation by the angel:

#### **1. Foundation:**

Joan of Arc was already a fervent believer in Christ and the mission of His Church by the time she met the angel. St. Michael didn’t need to give her a course in remedial Christianity for her mission. There are those who are instructed and guided by angels (Abraham, Genesis 18); others who are prevented from doing evil by an angel (Balaam, Numbers 22); still others whose lives are dramatically transformed by angels (Hagar, Genesis 21; Tobias and Sarah, Book of Tobit).

But when God sends an angel to enlist a soul for a particular mission, it is essential that the person have a foundation of faith (like Joshua, Gideon, the Virgin Mary, John of Revelation) upon which to build the understandings and capacities needed for the mission.

This was the case with the young Joan of Arc whose parents were deeply pious believers and whose entire milieu was that of a profoundly religious culture. It is not surprising that the Arc family home stood only twenty-five or thirty feet from their parish church. Joan grew up in the shadow of the Church. She learned her catechism and embraced the moral and spiritual values that accompanied a faith-imbued society. On top of that, it was

acknowledged by her own villagers that, even before she received her calling, Joan had a special attraction to prayer and the things of the spirit.

## 2. Willingness:

Upon this strong personal spiritual foundation an angel was able to build a mission, which came with a distinct clarity of purpose. The angel told Joan that she was the one whom God had chosen to do battle with the English. This was not as shocking a revelation to her as we might imagine. Her parents and her own French-partisan villagers were adamant that *someone* needed to drive those blasphemers out of holy France! (The French nickname for their enemy was *godon*, a mispronunciation of the term the English used when taking God's Name in vain.)

Likewise, the need to crown the Catholic king of France in the ancient venue of kingly consecrations – Reims Cathedral – eventually became a personal *imperative* for the young faithful woman. This mission that was later greeted by the intellectuals of the day with scoffing and derision was welcomed with a perfectly open heart by a faithful young woman, even if she had no idea how to implement the plans. That too would be directed by the angel in time.

## 3. Strength:

For nearly three years St. Michael appeared to Joan (together with two female saints, St. Margaret and St. Catherine of Alexandria) to communicate to her the spiritual strength needed for the mission. We don't know Michael's methods, but his continuous driving home of the basic outlines of what needed to be done must have acted like an engraving tool etching in her soul a line of firm purpose that would never be undone by the pragmatic logic of prideful, worldly men.

We may also surmise that it was the mystical visions themselves that filled Joan with the strength needed for the battles ahead. For those of us who have never been gifted with spiritual experiences of the sort, this dynamic might be difficult to comprehend. Nonetheless, we can see these mystical effects in other people who met angels: Abraham bowed down to the angels he met; Joshua took off his shoes on the holy ground consecrated by the angel; Daniel fell on his face and his companions fled in terror; John of Revelation actually wanted to worship his angelic messenger; the guards at the tomb of the Resurrected Christ *fainted*!

Like a trusted spiritual mentor, but vastly more so, the archangel Michael molded Joan's young soul with spiritual values to give her strength for

her mission: divine enlightenment, robustness of soul, virtue, a clear perception of God's will, and all the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit that, by their very nature, angels share in a superabundant way. All of those graces flowed into the soul of an extraordinary young woman who sat at the feet of an angel for three years.

### **Our Spiritual Foundation as Leaders**

Few of us will ever meet an angel face to face, and if so, we are unlikely to be sent to save a whole country! In the same respect, the basic contours of Joan of Arc's encounter with the angel apply to us for our respective missions as leaders.

First, while God assists everyone on the road to heaven, His chosen ones usually have a strong spiritual foundation upon which to build a mission. If we have not been given good faith formation by our parents, family of origin, or culture, we can make up for the deficit by becoming fervent believers and members of faith communities that strengthen our faith. This is the function of the Church: to communicate the saving message of Christ to others and to form our souls in the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Christ.

Second, God's missions are only for the willing, and they are always the fruit of prayer. The Kingdom of God is vast and wide and always has a great need of workers for the vineyard (Matthew 9:39), but whatever the call to leadership, our willing hearts allow God to work through us.

Likewise, clarity about God's will is the fruit of prayer. Yes, we should consult trusted counselors for discerning His will, but above all we must "beg the Lord of the harvest" to show us what He wants of us. In the Middle Ages people matured and entered into their vocations more quickly than today, so it is entirely believable that a young woman of thirteen or fourteen would already be seeking to know her path in life. This is why St. Michael appeared to her *in prayer*.

Finally, the many "angels" (role models) in our lives give us virtues and strength for our mission. What soul has not been inspired to greater faith by a truly holy person or some virtuous intervention of a righteous individual? Who has not been inflamed with love and hope by a fervent sermon or the witness of someone who has given his or her life in God's service?

Above all, we should pay close attention to the examples of leaders who are living the mission we wish to embrace. They or their personal stories have much to teach us even if they are not mentors in a direct sense. They are angels to us in a metaphorical sense, forming our souls, influencing our intellects, and

inflaming our desire for righteousness. God uses the wealth of His spiritual and human faith communities to give us vigor for the mission.

Joan shows us that angels are necessary for the spiritual foundation of a leader. Follow *your* angels into your holy mission.

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## 6

### The Feminine

#### **Virtue: Attraction.**

“A virgin has arisen from Lorraine and is laying claim to the ancient legend that prophesied the end of English domination in France. She says she is going to lift the siege of Orléans! What shall we do?”

This was the quandary that greeted the future king one day when he asked his chief chamberlain for news of his realm. I’m sure there has never been a more electrifying message to cross the desk of a powerful man. A maiden? A warrior? Defeat the English? Hmm. Charles was intrigued, to say the least. And with him, all of France.

When, at age seventeen, Joan set out to meet the dauphin, she petitioned the local constable, a man named Robert de Baudricourt, for help in getting to the royal palace. Baudricourt was a former military man who kept the lid on a fragile order in the Lorraine region for many years and was known to the dauphin. Joan had no resources of her own to undertake this mission, so it was up to Baudricourt to get her there.

Not unexpectedly, the constable rudely turned her away and told the uncle who had brought her to take her back home and give her a good spanking.

But Joan of Arc’s mission was afoot, and her feminine genius was not to be deterred.

About that same time, French troops had just suffered a catastrophic defeat in their first attempt to liberate Orléans from the siege, and Joan received a highly specific revelation about the event. Soon after that, she returned to Baudricourt and told him he was *personally responsible* for the deaths of their countrymen while he had in his hands the solution to the crisis and did nothing.

That got the military man’s attention.



The young woman persevered in her demand, insisted on it with intensity, and may have even pointed a finger in the constable's face as she spoke. Had a *man* acted that way toward the grizzled commander, Baudricourt would have lopped off the man's head.

Lo and behold! Joan got her ticket to the royal court.

### **The Unique Power of the Feminine**

We in the modern age are accustomed to seeing women in leadership roles, but the societies of the Middle Ages were most definitely *not*. Certainly there were famous and even powerful women in public life in that era, but when Joan, the maiden from rural France, declared that she was chosen to save the country by leading an army, absolutely nothing like that had been heard of before. Her vibrant femininity, so suddenly intruding into the stark world of men, was one of those mighty, natural gifts she traded on to enhance the mission.

Let us acknowledge two powerful characteristics of Joan's femininity that served her mission well:

#### **1. Total Beauty:**

Interestingly, there are no contemporaneous witnesses who praise Joan's *physical beauty* – those were the embellishments of later legends about her – but she was undoubtedly lovely in the way that any maiden in the flower of her youth would be. Her *femininity*, however, was another matter. When men of the 15<sup>th</sup> century wanted to laud a woman's beauty, they did it in a characteristically medieval way: they praised her *purity*. Their evaluation of beauty went much deeper than the surface aspects of things (and moderns could learn a lot from them in that regard). A woman's virtue was the source of her credibility. To “prove” herself, Joan had to undergo several humiliating virginity tests (conducted by noble women) and had to maintain the high moral standards of her faith and culture for her gender.

The excellence of Joan's moral character is so fully documented as to be indisputable. This may be why she had such a purifying effect on the soldiers she lived and fought with at close quarters. It seems to have been a consensus of all of her male associates that they felt not the slightest temptation to impurity when they were in her presence. In fact, her closest advisor, Jean, Duke of Alençon, once testified, without a hint of exaggeration, that Joan was the most virtuous (in his terms, *purest*) woman on the face of the earth.

The universal recognition of her total womanly beauty and high moral character gave to Joan a certain moral leverage over men that a male could not

possibly have had over other men of action. It is hard to overestimate the fervor with which the men of her day greeted the Maid and embraced her mission. When Joan set out to lift the siege of Orléans, the dauphin could barely muster 2,000 straggling recruits to accompany her. When she rode into the city of Reims for the king's coronation less than three months later, more than 11,000 soldiers rode with her.

## 2. Magnetism:

Added to her natural attractiveness, Joan's absolute conviction about her mission and her ability to articulate the terms of it drew men to her like a magnet. One historian called this the "irresistible power of her presence", which we can imagine was a combination of her recognized beauty and the force of her personality. And while she did have extraordinary spiritual gifts (like prophecy and insight into souls) her personal magnetism seemed to be a very natural quality that Joan used well for her mission.

For example, despite her total lack of formal education (she could not even read), Joan was extremely sharp-witted, and by all accounts was masterful in her use of the French language and imagery. Her exhortations delivered in a youthful soprano voice, her petite stature (at least compared to the men around her), and her rousing, emotional appeals for France made Joan's femininity a powerful weapon for good.

Her personality was so dynamic and her words so persuasive that even cynical, worldly men fell under her spell. A French nobleman, Constable Arthur de Richemont, who had previously betrayed the French king, was so taken by Joan that he renounced his service to England and rejoined the king's cause. Richemont provided the military force that ultimately proved decisive to drive out the English.

At the risk of being accused of sexism, we may say that Joan's feminine magnetism had an overwhelming motivating power over the demoralized men – and nation – of her day. It is unlikely that even a handsome young man in the vigor of his youth could have had the same effect. Joan's feminine beauty and virtue simply won over the hearts of her countrymen.

## **The Power of Attraction in Leadership**

Natural attractiveness and personal dynamism are not only female traits. But Joan shows us how *any* inherent human characteristics can be used for leadership. Writers of leadership books nowadays call this the "law of attraction", and I believe that *everyone* has some force of personal attraction to use for their mission. Here, of course, we are referring only to entirely moral and proper ways

of exercising personal influence. As with Joan, a leader's credibility has a great deal to do with personal integrity and high moral character.

Beauty is the first attraction over the hearts and minds of others, yet not in a physical way. Wherever some human skill or capacity is well-developed and well-utilized for a distinct purpose, we see real beauty. I recall watching a friend of mine sit at my computer and, in the space of about ten minutes, he adroitly fixed a technical problem that had plagued me for months. In addition to being very grateful, I was overwhelmed by his amazing technical knowledge and proficiency, which were utterly outside my skill set. In a very literal sense, my friend's simple act was a beautiful thing to behold.

But the same dynamic expresses itself when people act virtuously, when they accomplish great tasks with skill, or when they perform brilliantly at anything. These gifts are immensely attractive and draw people to them. I once interviewed the '90s country music star, Collin Raye, who told me that his calling to be a professional musician came when he went to see the rock band, the Eagles, in concert. He was so deeply affected by their performance that he made a decision right then and there to live the rest of his life performing music like his heroes on stage. His particular pathway to his dream eventually led to country music, but the attraction to the life of a performing musician was instilled in his heart at a rock concert.

We must also recognize that at times the unique contributions of women around us remain underutilized for our missions. When President John F. Kennedy made an official state visit to France in the early sixties, he knew how important it was to first win over the hearts of the French people. Upon arrival in Paris, he asked his lovely wife, Jackie – who spoke fluent French – to exit from Air Force One first, with JFK following behind her. Predictably, the image of the President's arrival emblazoned on the front page of every French newspaper that evening was of the elegant First Lady exiting the enormous airplane and greeting all the dignitaries in their native language – with her husband in tow. It was a huge PR *splash* with the French!

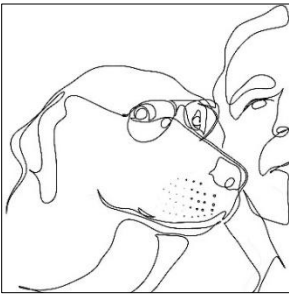
Secondly, a leader is “magnetic” when he or she has full conviction about the mission, well-honed skills for the task, and a persuasive ability to articulate the need that drives the mission. The average person is not attracted to flaccid leadership or to charlatans in corner offices. True leadership is not the ability to whip up a crowd or manipulate others into doing the leader's will. It is the ability to *draw* others to a cause and sustain them – morally, psychologically, even spiritually – as they see the mission through to its stated goals.

Joan had all of these abilities, which are powers of attraction encompassing both nature and spirit. *You* have some unique gifts and capacities for your mission too.

Go, use them to set the world on fire.

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## About the Author



Peter Darcy is a writer, editor, and web designer who spent thirty years in the non-profit sector and Catholic missionary work. His great passion is educating others about the power of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness. In 2020 he launched the Sacred Windows initiative for this purpose. He is a columnist at Catholic365.com.

Darcy has authored or ghostwritten fifteen books dedicated to spiritual and leadership themes, including:

- \* Praying with Fire: Learning to Pray the Catholic Way (2025)
- \* No Knot Too Tight: Short Reflections on Mary, Undoer of Knots (2024)
- \* Natures of Fire: God's Magnificent Angels (2021)
- \* No Nonsense Non-Profit: Leadership Principles for Church and Charity (2020), and
- \* The Seven Leadership Virtues of Joan of Arc (2020).

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