

PRUDENCE & THE CARDINAL VIRTUES

Catechism of the Catholic Church

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a7.htm

I. THE HUMAN VIRTUES

1804 Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good.

The moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love.

The Cardinal Virtues

1805 Four virtues play a pivotal role and accordingly are called “cardinal”; all the others are grouped around them. They are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. “If anyone loves righteousness, [Wisdom’s] labors are virtues; for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice, and courage.”⁶⁴ These virtues are praised under other names in many passages of Scripture.

1806 Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; “the prudent man looks where he is going.”⁶⁵ “Keep sane and sober for your prayers.”⁶⁶ Prudence is “right reason in action,” writes St. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle.⁶⁷ It is not to be

confused with timidity or fear, nor with duplicity or dissimulation. It is called *auriga virtutum* (the charioteer of the virtues); it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience. The prudent man determines and directs his conduct in accordance with this judgment. With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid.

1807 Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the “virtue of religion.” Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor. “You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.”⁶⁸ “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”⁶⁹

1808 Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce

and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause. “The Lord is my strength and my song.”⁷⁰ “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”⁷¹

1809 Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will’s mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion: “Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart.”⁷² Temperance is often praised in the Old Testament: “Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites.”⁷³ In the New Testament it is called “moderation” or “sobriety.” We ought “to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world.”⁷⁴

To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul and with all one’s efforts; from this it comes about that love is kept whole and uncorrupted (through temperance). No misfortune can disturb it (and this is fortitude). It obeys only [God] (and this is justice), and is careful in discerning things, so as not to be surprised by deceit or trickery (and this is prudence).⁷⁵
The virtues and grace

1810 Human virtues acquired by education, by deliberate acts and by a perseverance ever-renewed in repeated efforts are purified and elevated by divine grace. With God’s help, they forge character and give facility in the practice of the good. The virtuous man is happy to practice them.

1811 It is not easy for man, wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance. Christ’s gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues. Everyone should always ask for this grace of light and strength, frequent the sacraments, cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and follow his calls to love what is good and shun evil.

Prudence – Catholic Encyclopedia, 1917 (New Advent)
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12517b.htm>

(Latin *prudencia*, contracted from *providencia*, seeing ahead).

One of the four cardinal virtues. Definitions of it are plentiful from Aristotle down. His “*recta ratio agibilium*” has the merits of brevity and inclusiveness. Father Rickaby aptly renders it as “right reason applied to practice”. A fuller description and one more serviceable is this: an intellectual habit enabling us to see in any given juncture of human affairs what is virtuous and what is not, and how to come at the one and avoid the other. It is to be observed that prudence, whilst possessing in some sort an empire over all the moral virtues, itself aims to perfect not the will but the intellect in its practical decisions. Its function is to point out which course of action is to be taken in any round of concrete circumstances. It indicates which, here and now, is the golden mean wherein the essence of all virtue lies. It has nothing to do with directly willing the good it discerns. That is done by the particular moral virtue within whose province it falls. Prudence, therefore, has a directive capacity with regard to the other virtues. It lights the way and

measures the arena for their exercise. The insight it confers makes one distinguish successfully between their mere semblance and their reality. It must preside over the eliciting of all acts proper to any one of them at least if they be taken in their formal sense. Thus, without prudence bravery becomes foolhardiness; mercy sinks into weakness, and temperance into fanaticism. But it must not be forgotten that prudence is a virtue adequately distinct from the others, and not simply a condition attendant upon their operation. Its office is to determine for each in practice those circumstances of time, place, manner, etc. which should be observed, and which the Scholastics comprise under the term *medium rationis*. So it is that whilst it qualifies immediately the intellect and not the will, it is nevertheless rightly styled a moral virtue.

This is because the moral agent finds in it, if not the eliciting, at any rate the directive principle of virtuous actions. According to St. Thomas (II-II, Q. xlvii, a. 8) it is its function to do three things: to take counsel, i.e. to cast about for the means suited in the particular case under consideration to reach the end of any one moral virtue; to judge soundly of the fitness of the means suggested; and, finally, to command their employment. If these are to be done well they necessarily exclude remissness and lack of concern; they demand the use of such diligence and care that the resultant act can be described as prudent, in spite of whatever speculative error may have been at the bottom of the process. Readiness in finding out and ability in adapting means to an end does not always imply prudence. If the end happens to be a vicious one, a certain adroitness or sagacity may be exhibited in its pursuit.

This, however, according to St. Thomas, will only deserve to be called false prudence and is identical with that referred to in Rom., viii, 6, “the wisdom of the flesh is death”. Besides the prudence which is the fruit of training and experience, and is developed into a stable habit by repeated acts, there is another sort termed “infused”. This is directly bestowed by God’s bounty. It is inseparable from the condition of supernatural charity and so is to be found only in those who are in the state of grace. Its scope of course is to make provision of what is necessary for eternal salvation. Although acquired prudence considered as a principle of operation is quite compatible with sin in the agent, still it is well to note that vice obscures or at times utterly beclouds its judgment. Thus it is true that prudence and the other moral virtues are mutually interdependent. Imprudence in so far as it implies a want of obligatory prudence and not a mere gap in practical mentality is a sin, not however always necessarily distinct from the special wicked indulgence which it happens to accompany. If it proceeds to the length of formal scorn of the Divine utterances on the point, it will be a mortal sin.

Delany, Joseph. “Prudence.” The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 12. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911.

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Prudence – the Cardinal Virtues

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Downey, M. (2000, c1993). The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality.

“A Michael Glazier book” (electronic ed.) (114). Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

As the Book of Wisdom (8:7) asserts, “If one loves justice, the fruits of her works

are virtues; for she teaches moderation and prudence, justice and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful than these.” These four virtues have been emphasized as central to good moral living by the ancient Greek philosophers as well as by Thomas Aquinas and others in the Catholic spiritual tradition. Among many prized virtues, the four have been termed “cardinal” (from Latin *cardo*, “hinge”) since the days of Ambrose, because all other moral virtues have been seen as dependent on what they embrace: the ability to discern (prudence), respect for the rights of others (justice), courage in the face of challenges and frustrations (fortitude), and moderation of bodily appetites (temperance). Christian virtues can be understood as developed capacities of the human will and intellect to accomplish moral good with constancy and joy, even in the midst of obstacles and always under the influence of the grace of Christ. The four cardinal virtues are held to be distinct from the three “theological” virtues of faith, hope and charity, which relate more directly to God but constitute the context within which cardinal virtues find their Christian meaning.

Far from bringing about mere self-mastery or self-possession, the cardinal virtues orient people outward toward others and God in loving self-giving. The best-formulated teachings about these virtues presuppose that human life participates in the dying and rising of Christ and entails ongoing conversion away from sin toward fuller union with God. Virtues are not ultimately possessions at all, but rather aspects of a unified quest for a life of openness to God that can only be received as grace. A heritage of careful consideration of sepa-

rate virtues in the Catholic theological tradition should not obscure the ideas that the Christian life is one pursuit, albeit with many dimensions, and that the four cardinal virtues are intrinsically interrelated.

Aquinas’s detailed study of the moral life in the *Summa Theologiae* presupposes that all things come from God (*exitus*) and are oriented back to God (*reditus*). Virtues are important means by which humans can return to God. The moral theology of Aquinas closely considers the cardinal virtues, their component elements, their subsidiary moral virtues, and their opposite vices. In all, over fifty virtues and more than a hundred vices are noted. An important Thomistic principle states that one cannot practice one virtue perfectly unless one possesses all of them. In the spirit of Aquinas, the primary question for the Christian called to live the virtues is not “What shall I do?” but “What kind of person shall I be?” Each of the four cardinal virtues disposes different powers and appetites of one who would strive to be a holy disciple of Jesus Christ.

PRUDENCE

Prudence, the “know how” virtue of the practical intellect, seeks the best way to do the right thing in specific circumstances. Entailing the capacity to translate general principles and ideals into practice, prudence deals with acts that are individual but not isolated, for it must know the singular always in its relation to universal norms. Distorted notions of prudence as undue caution, inactivity, moral mediocrity, or selfishness can hamper a richer understanding of the virtue as oriented ultimately toward the praise and service of God.

Successive steps often recommended in exercising the virtue of prudence are: (1) making inquiry, taking counsel, deliberating; (2) making judgment about application of knowledge to a particular situation; and (3) giving command and doing the action.

Qualities found in the prudent person are many: knowledge of moral principles, ability to profit from life experiences, vigilance, perceptivity, docility, ability to make rational inferences, inventiveness or creativity, foresight, and ability to balance and weigh circumstances. Obstacles to prudence include rashness, hesitation, procrastination, negligence, rationalization, and inconstancy.

The Christian spiritual tradition has dealt with the virtue of prudence largely through themes of prayerful reflection and discernment. Prayer can foster growth in prudence, especially when prayer includes thorough meditation on one's everyday experiences and honest examination of one's motivations. In this vein, Bernard of Clairvaux, in *Five Books on Consideration*, spoke of "consideration" (sustained reflection aimed at greater knowledge of self, others, one's surroundings, and God) as displaying prudence, since it purifies the mind, "controls the emotions, guides actions, corrects excesses, improves behavior, confers dignity and order on life, and even imparts knowledge of divine and human affairs" (VII:8).

The discernment of spirits, a practice long valued in the Christian tradition and central to the Ignatian school, exercises prudence as it brings meditation to bear on concrete decisions that arise particularly within a life of action. Un-

der the influence of faith, hope, and charity, discerning individuals or communities examine the nature of the spiritual promptings they experience, as they aim to choose a course of action that best glorifies God and serves others.

Proper emphasis on prudence as a virtue mediating between theory and practice can help to reinforce the long-neglected interconnection of theology with both spirituality and pastoral life. Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) links the essence of the virtue of prudence with the mission of the Church in the late 20th century: "For the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographical areas...but also of affecting and, as it were, upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation" (art. 19). While respecting the intrinsic link between being and doing, contemporary Christian moral teaching on prudence puts more stress on the importance of the overall faith vision out of which the moral good is to be perceived than on specific instructions on how to do good and avoid evil.

JUSTICE

Justice is the virtue concerned with giving to others what is their due. Human nature imposes on each one an obligation to tend to one's last end and to conform one's conduct to those things necessary to achieve that end. One cannot have such obligations without the right to fulfill them and the consequent right to prevent others from interfering

with their fulfillment. Joined prominently to justice is the separate virtue of religion (Latin *religare*, “to bind”), the honor paid by humans toward God, who has a right to their adoration for having created and redeemed them.

Justice is considered as having three basic forms: commutative justice, in relations of people with one another; distributive justice, in relations of society (family, state, church) to individuals; and legal justice, whereby individuals subordinate themselves to the common good.

Writings of the great spiritual writers speak little about justice in itself but much about love, faithfulness, devotion, obedience, and gratitude, virtues related to justice. They speak clearly about two themes that underpin the human rights tradition: that humans are created in the image of God and that they are called to eternal life with God. Christian spiritual movements over the centuries have exemplified care for the socially deprived, e.g., widows, orphans, prisoners, the sick, the uneducated. The papal social encyclicals of the late 19th and 20th centuries have clearly enunciated the need for a just social order and have urged all to take part in achieving this goal.

Recent spiritualities of liberation have looked to the biblical Exodus theme, to the prophets’ pleas for justice, and to Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom to ground a call for justice that extends to social, economic, and political circumstances worldwide.

FORTITUDE

The virtue of fortitude involves standing firm in hope against all pressures, even

death. In situations of suffering, desolation, and controversy, it is fortitude, or courage, that moderates the irascible appetite by strengthening it against the passion of fear and by curbing its immoderate stirrings of audacity and destructiveness.

Since fortitude involves human capacities for powerful action that can be oriented positively or negatively, its practice must be guided by self-knowledge and informed by prudence, lest either foolish temerity or quaking timidity hold sway.

The acts of fortitude have been described in the tradition as two – endurance and attack. Endurance, which is more than mere passive submission to danger and suffering, involves the strong action of holding steadfastly to the good while refusing to yield to fear or pain. Its close ally is the virtue of patience (Latin *pati*, “to suffer”), which involves preserving serenity despite injuries resulting from realization of the good. Attack is that aspect of fortitude that does not hesitate to pounce on evil and to bar its progress if this can reasonably be done. When attack stems from motives that are not selfish or wrong, it has sometimes been called “holy anger.” Both aspects of fortitude are allied to the virtue of perseverance, or constancy, which strengthens sustained commitment to a good pursuit that one might be tempted to abandon.

In the Christian tradition, endurance has been assigned higher value than attack, inasmuch as endurance often has called for greater bravery. From the Church’s early centuries the endurance of a martyr’s death stands as the epitome of brave witness to Jesus Christ

and his ways. Later, monks living ascetically in community (as “white martyrs”) esteemed patience as a way of ongoing and usually quiet participation in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ.

The context for much contemporary reflection on the virtue of fortitude in everyday living is the human experience of frustration, in which one’s goal-seeking is obstructed by factors having to do with oneself, others, the environment, or even the hiddenness of God. For example, Karl Rahner’s spiritual writings contain numerous examples of Spirit-empowered fortitude, as when one’s love for a neighbor is steadfast although not reciprocated, or when one prays faithfully even when God seems silent.

Spiritual support groups, many inspired by the twelve-step model practiced in Alcoholics Anonymous, offer members help in being courageous in various conditions. A favorite prayer of these participants combines themes of fortitude and prudence: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”

TEMPERANCE

Temperance is the virtue that moderates one’s bodily appetites and disposes them for development of the whole person. It fosters what might be called selfless self-preservation, since it treats sensual instincts not as ends in themselves but as means to an end, the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. One who chooses to temper or channel the sources of power that lie under one’s control is open to experience that life has another and deeper source – God.

The spiritual tradition has often spoken of temperance in terms of asceticism, the “exercise” of removing obstacles that stand in the way of following Christ more freely, and mortification, the “putting to death” of unbridled passions through discipline and self-denial. A sound approach to these themes would acknowledge that the body is not the enemy of the spirit but a normal channel by which spirit expresses itself. Unfortunately, the Christian centuries have not always witnessed such soundness or balance in all who seek spiritual growth. In fact, the Christian tradition’s greatest spiritual teachers have counteracted with calls for moderation in spiritual disciplines and penances.

The Christian spiritual tradition has taught that anyone who becomes the servant of the forces of disintegration within oneself, by yielding every time their drive is experienced, is inevitably more and more impaired in every aspect of life; so one becomes less disposed to see truth, to want it, and to choose it.

Maintaining a balanced, or temperate, rhythm of life has long been recommended as essential to growth in holiness. Each person must discover his or her own spiritual equilibrium, by reflection, experimentation, and ongoing effort. Guided by the insight that God does not call a person in ways that violate personal temperament, some recent spiritual writers have stressed the benefits of linking personality types with fitting ways of praying and structuring spiritual disciplines.

Some contemporary theologians have suggested that these four virtues are actually not the most central to Christian moral living. For example, Bernard

Häring has proposed that six others – gratitude, humility, hope, vigilance, serenity, and joy – are more richly based in Scripture and more clearly eschatological. Still, reflection on the cardinal virtues can lead people of any age to ponder some of the most crucial dimensions of a holy Christian life.

Bibliography: J. Crossin, “What Are They Saying About Virtue?” (New York: Paulist, 1985). J. O’Donohoe, “A Return to Virtue,” *Church* 3/1 (Spring 1987) 48-54. J. Pieper, “The Four Cardinal Virtues” (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1966).

Prudence: A Cardinal Virtue

By Scott P. Richert, About.com Guide

<http://catholicism.about.com/od/beliefsteachings/p/Prudence.htm>

One of the Four Cardinal Virtues:

Prudence is one of the four cardinal virtues. Like the other three, it is a virtue that can be practiced by anyone; unlike the theological virtues, the cardinal virtues are not, in themselves, the gifts of God through grace but the outgrowth of habit. However, Christians can grow in the cardinal virtues through sanctifying grace, and thus prudence can take on a supernatural dimension as well as a natural one.

What Prudence Is Not:

Many Catholics think prudence simply refers to the practical application of moral principles. They speak, for instance, of the decision to go to war as a “prudential judgment,” suggesting that reasonable people can disagree on the application of moral principles and, therefore, such judgments can be questioned but never absolutely declared

wrong. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of prudence, which, as Fr. John A. Hardon notes in his *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, is “Correct knowledge about things to be done or, more broadly, the knowledge of things that ought to be done and of thing that ought to be avoided.”

“Right Reason Applied to Practice”:

Aristotle was closer to the truth. As the *Catholic Encyclopedia* notes, he defined prudence as *recta ratio agibilium*, “right reason applied to practice.” The emphasis on “right” is important. We cannot simply make a decision and then describe it as a “prudential judgment.” Prudence requires us to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Thus, as Father Hardon writes, “It is the intellectual virtue whereby a human being recognizes in any matter at hand what is good and what is evil.” If we mistake the evil for the good, we are not exercising prudence—in fact, we are showing our lack of it.

Prudence in Everyday Life:

So how do we know when we’re exercising prudence and when we’re simply giving in to our own desires? Father Hardon notes three stages of an act of prudence: “to take counsel carefully with oneself and from others”; “to judge correctly on the basis of the evidence at hand”; “to direct the rest of one’s activity according to the norms determined after a prudent judgment has been made.”

Disregarding the advice or warnings of others whose judgment does not coincide with ours is a sign of imprudence. It is possible that we are right and others

wrong; but the opposite may be true, especially if we are in the minority.

Some Final Thoughts on Prudence:

Since prudence can take on a supernatural dimension through the gift of grace, we should carefully evaluate the counsel we receive from others with that in mind. When, for instance, the popes express their judgment on the justice of a particular war, we should value that more highly than the advice of someone who stands to profit monetarily from the war.

And we must always keep in mind that the definition of prudence requires us to judge correctly. If our judgment is proved after the fact to have been incorrect, then we did not make a “prudential judgment” but an imprudent one, for which we may need to make amends.

Prudence: Mother of All Virtues

Fr. William Saunders

<http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0530.html>

I keep hearing about the importance of virtue and being virtuous, but no one explains what virtue is. Why don't you do a column about this?

St. Paul, in his Letter to the Philippians, captured the idea of virtue and the living of a virtuous life: “My brothers, your thoughts should be wholly directed to all that is true, all that deserves respect, all that is honest, pure, admirable, decent, virtuous or worthy of praise” (4:8). With this in mind, the classic definition of virtue is a habit or firm disposition that inclines a person to do good and to avoid

evil. Characterized by stability, a virtuous person not only strives to be a good person, but also seeks what is good and chooses to act in a good way. Aristotle defined virtue as “that which makes both a person and what he does good.”

Dr. Joseph Pieper, one of the great Thomist theologians and an expert on virtue, provided this explanation: “The doctrine of virtue ... has things to say about this person; it speaks both of the kind of being which is his when he enters the world, as a consequence of his createdness and the kind of being he ought to strive toward and attain to — by being prudent, just, temperate and brave. The doctrine of virtue is one form of the doctrine of obligation, but one by nature free of regimentation and restriction” (The Four Cardinal Virtues).

On one hand, an individual can acquire human virtues through his own effort under the guidance of reason. Through education, by deliberately choosing to do what is good, and through perseverance, a person acquires and strengthens virtue.

On the other hand, with the help of divine grace from God, the individual finds greater strength and facility to practice these virtues. Through these grace-assisted virtues, which we would now call moral virtues, he gains self-mastery of his weakened nature due to original sin. In sum, these virtues help to forge that Christian character and to motivate a person to become God-like, in the best sense of the term.

There are four primary moral virtues, which are called the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. The word cardinal derives from

the Latin *cardo*, meaning “hinge.” Consequently, these four virtues are called “cardinal” because all other virtues are categorized under them and hinge upon them. The Book of Wisdom of the Old Testament states, “For [wisdom] teaches temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful for men than these” (8:7).

Prudence, the “mother” of all of the virtues, is the virtue by which a person recognizes his moral duty and the good means to accomplish it. Actually, prudence is part of the definition of goodness. A person can be prudent and good only simultaneously. No other virtue can contradict what is prudent. Therefore, what is prudent is substantially what is good, and prudence is the measure of justice, temperance and fortitude.

A prudent person looks at the concrete reality of a situation with a clear, honest objectivity; references and applies the moral truths (e.g. the Ten Commandments or the teachings of the Church); makes a moral judgment; and then commands an action. Moreover, prudence also seeks to accomplish the action in a good way — doing what is good in a good way.

Clearly, prudence is essential for the formation and operation of one’s conscience. To be a prudent person, one must know God’s truth, just as to have a good conscience, one must know God’s truth. One cannot do what is good if one does not know the principles of truth and goodness.

To prudently examine a situation and then to determine a course of action, one must keep in mind three aspects of prudence: *memoria*, *docilitas* and

solertia. *Memoria* simply means having a “true-to-being” memory which contains real things and events as they really are now and were in the past. Everyone must learn from his past experiences. Remembering what is to be done or avoided from past experiences helps to alert us to the occasions and causes of sin, to prevent us from making the same mistakes twice and to inspire us to do what is good. Be on guard: the falsification or denial of recollection is a grave impediment to exercising prudence.

Docilitas means that a person must have docility, an open-mindedness, which makes the person receptive to the advice and counsel of other people. A person should always seek and heed the wise counsel of those who are older, more experienced and more knowledgeable.

Finally, the exercise of prudence involves *solertia*, which is sagacity. Here a person has a clear vision of the situation at hand, foresees the goal and consequences of an action, considers the special circumstances involved and overcomes the temptation of injustice, cowardice, or intemperance. With *solertia*, a person acts in a timely manner but with due reflection and consideration to decide what is good and how to do the good. With a well-formed conscience attuned to God’s truth, and with the proper exercise of *memoria*, *docilitas* and *solertia*, a person will act prudently.

Contrary vices to prudence include precipitance (acting impulsively), inconstancy (changing resolutions too quickly), negligence and losing sight of one’s supernatural destiny, namely eternal life. Perhaps the last vice is most prevalent today: too many people act without

regard to their eternal judgment and without setting their sights on Heaven. The prudent person seeks to always do what is good in the eyes of God so as one day to be joined to His everlasting goodness in Heaven. After all, Jesus asked, “What profit would a man show if he were to gain the whole world and destroy himself in the process?” (Mt 16:26).

Given this introduction to the cardinal virtues and to the virtue of prudence, next week we will continue the discussion on the virtues of justice, fortitude and temperance.

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