

July Leadership Circle Prudence



VIRTUE CORNER

Prudence is the final moral virtue we are seeing in our series on the Lumen Core Value of Character. The four lumen virtues that make up that core value of Character are Self Mastery, Fairness, Perseverance and Prudence. Every worthwhile endeavor involves a series of critical choices. Each choice is preceded by reflection and deliberation – think of generals stooping over maps, councils gathered around oval-shaped tables, and husbands and wives discussing their futures. The process of deliberation, reflection, and choice of what to go for and how to get it – that’s the ambit of prudence: *The habitual ability to choose the best means to attain a particular goal.* Christian prudence adds an important element: it subordinates all particular goals to the ultimate goal, heaven.

Latin *prudencia* meaning "foresight, sagacity". It is often associated with wisdom, insight, and knowledge. In this case, the virtue is the ability to judge between virtuous and vicious actions, not only in a general sense, but with regard to appropriate actions at a given time and place. Although prudence itself does not perform any actions, and is concerned solely with knowledge, it is essential to acting well and all virtues are regulated by prudence. Aristotle called it the charioteer of all virtues. We might call it the quarterback or field general.

In modern English, the word has become increasingly synonymous with cautiousness. In this sense, prudence names a reluctance to take unnecessary risks, but when unreasonably extended into over-cautiousness, can become the vice of cowardice.

The benefits of prudence are many. It helps us *avoid the misery of a divided life.* The prudent man can structure his resources and priorities so as to be a success at work and at home; he can integrate his deepest values with his most pressing practical obligations, so he’ll never look happy on the outside while being anguished on the inside. The prudent man never feels out of control of his time. *Prudence avoids the agony of regret.* The prudent man has foresight: he doesn’t have to spend his life putting out fires, because he solves problems before they flare up; he doesn’t spend his life wishing he had acted differently, because he discerns the right path before getting underway. *Prudence brings peace of mind and strength of spirit.* The prudent man knows where he is going and how to get there, so he is free to engage all the powers of his soul to their maximum capacity. Prudence does require time for reflection and thought. Daily prayer, moments of strategizing, considering your goals and time to review progress are all required by the virtue of prudence.

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." It is called 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 and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid.

— Catechism of the Catholic Church #1806



GOSPEL REFLECTION (30 MIN)

Matthew 6: 19 – 33

19“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal.¹20But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal.21For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. 22“The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light;23but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness. And if the light in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be. 24 “No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?26Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they?27Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? 28Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin.29But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them.30 If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?31So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’32All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.33But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Context. Jesus is presenting the core tenants of his good news both to his disciples and the wider crowd who has gathered. Why is this passage so important?
2. Prudence is about the best means to reach my true good. What lessons are found here about my true end?
3. The prudent person doesn’t worry about secondary things because he treasures what is most important. Can I say my heart is truly set on the things of Christ?
4. Jesus puts the example of the most precarious of creatures – a wild flower, field grass, one of the many birds in the sky. What is the point he is trying to make and how can you relate it to prudence?
5. How can worry about things we can’t control be an obstacle to living and growing in prudence?
6. What is the “kingdom of God” mean for you? What is it or how would you describe it?





CASE DISCUSSION (30 MIN)

2 ways to go about it. Read the Case and one of the members can voluntarily offer a decision they are facing and go through the steps to see what is the prudent decision. Another approach can be for members to discuss in general their challenges in practicing this core virtue at home, in the work place or in their lumen action. The circle can offer some personal experiences on how they have confronted and resolved similar difficulties.

Three Parts of a Prudential Decisions and Actions

Step one: Deliberation. This is the stage where we gather all the relevant information, starting with a consideration of moral principles. This includes an awareness and acceptance of the authoritative teaching of the Church's Magisterium; since the Church's teaching gives us true principles, it's important to see if they teach anything definitively about the issue at hand. For example, if the Church says that a certain act is immoral, then you don't need to deliberate about that act anymore; you know not to do it. While deliberating, we must also give a careful examination of the concrete situation, to be sure that we have understood it as fully as possible. It is also sometimes advisable to take counsel with those who are themselves experienced, prudent, and knowledgeable about the matter at hand. With this step it is absolutely critical that we be completely honest.

Failure to deliberate is called rashness or thoughtlessness. This is when someone just rushes headlong into everything, without ever taking a moment to think it over. It is very dangerous to "act without thinking," to not consider carefully enough before action. It may work in a Star Wars universe (don't think; just trust your feelings, Luke!), but in the real world it's deadly. If you don't reflect on your decisions beforehand, you will make really stupid decisions. Look at the options, seek advice, pray to God for His guidance, reflect, and take a reasonable amount of time before you act.

Step two: Judgment. After deliberating, we must weigh all the evidence fairly, and then figure out the best course of action. Judgment separates the relevant information from the irrelevant information, and then applies it to the problem at hand. You can't just think about something forever; you have to come to some sort of conclusion. Failure to make a judgment is called indecision. Procrastination, beating about the bush, fiddling around, all are ways of expressing this common vice. Thinking about some issue without actually arriving at a practical result does no one any good.

Step three: Execution. Once we judge the right thing to do, we have got to act! If you figure out the proper action, but then fail to perform it, what's the benefit? You do not have the virtue of prudence until you actually do what you have judged to be right. Failure to carry out what you believe to be the proper decision is called irresoluteness. Plenty of people make hoards of decisions, and never manage to keep any of them. They can't be faithful to a resolution. One day they've decided to do this major in college, and then they change their minds and decide to do that major. The same happens in the case of jobs, or vocations. Such people suffer from the vice of inconstancy. A helpful exercise might be to analyze these three stages and see where it is that you most often fail in your own life. Are you thoughtless? Indecisive? Inconstant and undependable? Once you identify your weakness, you can make the conscious decision to work on that area of prudence, and so hopefully improve in this fundamental virtue.

1. In which of these steps do I most struggle with making prudent decisions?
2. In which of these steps do I do better?
3. What can I do to help me avoid my weakness and capitalize on my strengths in my prudent decisions making process?



Lumen Core Values Self-Assessment (10 minutes)

Core Values Assessment. Spend 10 minutes in silence assessing positive and negative examples of how you have demonstrated prudence in your relationship with others and God.

1. Would I consider myself a prudent person? Why?
2. Do I take and seek council well or do I tend to approach circumstances with preconceived ideas?
3. What goals or personal reforms have I been procrastinating? Why?

The below quadrant can help in jotting down some of your assessment as well as a tool for the whole Lumen Circle and how you can let it be a leaven in your life.

What struck me in this circle and how I might apply it to my THINKING. What CRITICAL ISSUES am I facing? What is the biggest CHALLENGES with these issues I face and what OPPORTUNITIES does it present.

Prayer:

Family:

Business:

Lumen Action:

What ACTION STEPS can I take now or long term? Develop a concrete resolution for how you can improve in your efforts to exercise Christian charity in you interactions with others during the next month. Your resolution should be a specific action or activity that is easily measured.



Resources:

<http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/education/catholic-contributions/the-virtue-of-prudence.html>

<http://www.catholicmannight.com/uncategorized/the-prudence-of-jesus-christ/>

<http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/education/virtue-education/the-art-of-living-the-first-step-of-prudence.html>

Prudence in Practice

In Family

- Set concrete, measurable goals for what kind of spouse and parent you want to be
- Develop family traditions that foster unity, affection, and growth in virtue
- Study and get disinterested advice about how to be a better spouse and parent
- Talk regularly and deeply about family issues with family members
- Invest time and energy in building a successful family
- Know and follow the Church's time-tested teaching and guidance about family and marriage

Prudence Does...

- Keep your long-term vision fresh
- Proper due-diligence before every decision
- Study current and up-and-coming factors affecting products and markets
- Wait before acting on whims
- Constantly reevaluate and strive for improvement
- Prefer long-term productivity, stability and growth to short-term splashes
- Keep up to date on and apply the Church's teaching about business and social ethics

In Business

Prudence Doesn't...

- Depend solely on instinct to be an effective parent and spouse
- Take success in family life for granted
- Forget that you have character flaws that can bother and hurt the other members of your family
- Second-guess decisions that you made with care and responsibility
- Act and make decisions merely out of intense, passing emotion
- Refuse to get advice about how to solve family difficulties
- Leave valuable interpersonal skills at the office
- Insist on being a Lone Ranger
- Stay satisfied with what has already been achieved
- Make decisions without sufficient information and reflection
- Think only in terms of money and not in terms of people
- Think only in terms of your business and not in terms of society as a whole
- Keep God out of your boardroom

cfr. Lumen Core Value Reference Manual

