



VIRTUE CORNER

For October and November, we will be doing a two-part series delving into the Lumen Core Value of **prudence**. According to the Lumen handbook, prudence is *sound judgment in determining actions*. We can complement this with the definition from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 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.*” In other words, it is the virtue that helps us to *know* what is the best way to respond to each circumstance in our lives, and then to *choose* the best way of going about it. Prudence helps us to habitually apply general principles (like “Thou shalt not kill” or “always be charitable”) to individual situations.

Every worthwhile endeavor involves a series of critical choices. Each choice should be preceded by reflection and deliberation – think of the great generals stooping over maps, presidents’ consulting their cabinet members, or coaches analyzing game tapes. The process of deliberating and reflecting (in order to *know*), and then ultimately *choosing* how to get it – that’s the ambit of prudence: the habit of choosing the right means to attain a particular goal in accordance with God’s will. Christian prudence adds an important element: it subordinates all particular goals to the ultimate goal: heaven.

There are several words used to describe the opposite of prudence: recklessness, rashness, thoughtlessness, irresponsibility. It isn’t difficult to find examples in the business world (or elsewhere) where decisions were made -or courses of action taken- that could be described by some of these opposites. Also, *excessive* prudence can lead to timidity and “analysis paralysis.” Authentically prudent decisions don’t automatically guarantee success, but they certainly set us in the right direction.

The key difference between a prudent and imprudent decision is in the definition itself: sound judgment or the proper use of our reason. Was the decision well thought out? Was it founded on the facts? Was it informed by an appropriate hierarchy of values?

Imprudent decisions have many causes. Certainly, not having sufficient information concerning the decision to be made, not knowing enough, is crucial; thus the need for reflection and docility towards competent mentors, guides, or coaches. But St. Thomas Aquinas taught the surprising truth that almost all imprudent behavior proceeds from what he called *avaritia*, which we could translate as avarice, covetousness, or simply greed. *Avaritia* is not just greediness towards money, but the immoderate striving after all possessions to assure my importance, status, or merit. If, because of my “avarice,” I misjudge the goodness of things according to their usefulness for me and my exaltation, then I will not be objective enough, interiorly silent enough, to discern what is truly good, nor be free enough to put it into execution. The “noise” of my covetousness will drown out the humble silence of the truth.

All of humanity is subject to these same pressures and influences to some degree. As Christians, we have a gift to bring to the table: the gift of the Holy Spirit. We can ask the Holy Spirit to help us form in ourselves the virtue of prudence.

It is a truth but too well known, that rashness attends youth, as prudence does old age. - Cicero



SCRIPTURE REFLECTION (30 MIN)

Lk 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.” He replied to him, “Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?” Then he said to the crowd, “Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions.” Then he told them a parable.

“There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest. He asked himself, ‘What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?’ And he said, ‘This is what I shall do: I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods and I shall say to myself, “Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!”’ But God said to him, ‘You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’ Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God.”

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are some of my initial reactions to this passage? What runs through my mind as I read it?
2. The second part of this passage is a parable, a story Jesus made up to illustrate a point to his followers. What is the image of God that Jesus wants to get across to us in this parable? Does it teach us anything?
3. Into what pitfalls did the rich man fall? What are a few possibilities of what he was thinking?
4. In our relationship with God, how does the virtue of prudence come into play? What does this passage seem to say?
5. How can we be sure that we are using the gifts God gives us prudently? What are some of the gifts I possess that I must use prudently?





CASE DISCUSSION (30 MIN)

2 ways to go about it. Read the examples of a situation in which a prudent decision needed to be made, or ask a member to voluntarily offer some similar challenge with which they have been faced at home, in the workplace, or in their Lumen action (volunteer work). The circle can offer some personal experiences on how they have confronted and resolved similar difficulties.

Example 1) A father is trying to decide where to send his child to school. The general principle in his head is, of course, to give his child the best education possible. But after that there is a host of questions that come up: how much does it cost, how far from my home, what about home schooling, the kindergarten teacher is terrible, what about the faith component, etc. In theory, a father who has acquired the habit of prudence would be able to *understand or discern* what is the best school for the child, and then *decide* also the best means of going about paying for it, providing the transportation, dealing with the kindergarten teacher, etc. What are the factors we would use, or have used, in choosing a school for our children?

Example 2) A Catholic family is on vacations, and is deep in the woods of Colorado on a Sunday. That very morning, they find out that where they were planning on going to Sunday Mass is no longer a possibility: the parish has canceled mass because the priest is sick. So, the only other possibility is driving 60 miles to the second nearest parish. Do I go? Do I bring the children or do I leave the older ones at camp? Do I leave all the camping materials at risk? Should I just forego Mass all together? What is the prudent decision?

Questions for reflection

1. Prudence is sound judgment in determining actions. What are some of the criteria we use to make decisions in situations such as these? Is there a hierarchy in these criteria?
2. What are some of the elements that may affect us into making an imprudent decision?
3. Christian prudence always presupposes our ultimate goal: heaven. How heavy should this factor weight in our everyday decisions?
4. To make prudent family, business, and life decisions, what *people, processes, or safeguards* have you found to be most helpful?
5. In both situations, in what ways could St. Thomas' *averice* (above in the virtue corner) come into play? How can I detect if it is affecting me?



Resources:

The Wisdom of the Church on Prudence

Catechism of the Catholic Church #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.

#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.

The Spiritual Life, Adolphe Tanqueray. p. 481

"To act prudently, three conditions are particularly necessary: mature *deliberation*, a wise *choice*, and right *execution*."

Self-Assessment and Key Takeaways (10 min)

Core Values Assessment. Spend 10 minutes in silence assessing positive and negative examples of how you live this lumen virtue in your relationship with others and God. What times work best for you to prayer and what essential elements do you include in your prayer. The below quadrant can help in jotting down some of your assessment as well as a tool to jot notes down during this Lumen Circle.

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

Prayer:

Family:

Business:
lumeninstitute.org



Character



Faith



Leadership

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 Influence in your interactions with others during the next month. Your resolution should be a specific action or activity that is easily measured.

