



Institute of St. Joseph
 St. Thomas Aquinas
 1225 – 1274

In Brief:

ON CHRISTIAN PRUDENCE

“O Lord Jesus Christ, in every step of Your life You were guided by the Holy Spirit and truth, which filled Your human and divine soul. I ask You to send Your Holy Spirit on me that I may judge things wisely in this world. It would be helpful if I had natural prudence, and I appreciate this gift. Most of all I want to have the prudence that You give, the prudence that seeks first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and knows that all other things necessary will be given to me. Help me to give an example of true prudence seeking the Kingdom of God in all that I do, and help me avoid the false wisdom of the world and of things that pass away. Amen.”

-The Virtue Driven Life
 Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R.

Sacred Scripture:

“The wisdom of a prudent man is to discern his way, but the folly of fools is deceiving.”
Proverbs 14:8.

“A fool despises his father’s instruction, but he who heeds admonition is prudent.”
Proverbs 15:5.

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH

PRUDENCE

Catechism of the Catholic Church:

“*Prudence* is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern (discovering God’s will) our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; ‘the prudent man looks where he is going.’ Prudence is ‘right reason in action,’ writes Saint Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle. It is not to be confused with timidity or fear, nor with duplicity or dissimulation. 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 without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid” (CCC 1806).

What is the virtue of prudence?

Prudence is the acquired habit of right judgment. Natural prudence is about making right decisions from a purely natural perspective and supernatural prudence is about making good decisions in accordance with God’s will, which is good and the very best for me, that will benefit me now *and* eternally.

- The *natural* virtue of prudence is basically common sense in sound judgment regarding practical matters. It assists people to arrange their lives and activities in order to achieve the goal of a happy life. It is naturally prudent to look both ways before crossing the street.
- The *supernatural* virtue of prudence makes us order our activities, desires, resources, and behavior in accordance with the Gospel so that we may come to eternal life. The Church reminds us that we must use supernatural prudence and courage when we are faced with evil. We can do many things that are imprudent from a worldly perspective but which are prudent for eternal life. The martyrs are celebrated for their living witness of supernatural prudence—they gave up their natural life for Jesus’ sake. An example involved those Christians who protected Jews from death camps.

Why do we need the virtue of prudence?

- Prudence helps the intellect to see the right thing to do and to choose the right means for achieving it. Choosing wisely involves taking good counsel while obtaining knowledge from the past and present.
- Prudence entails the application of good moral principles to particular cases assisting us to know what to seek and what to avoid.
- Prudence is necessary in order to seek the common good for all.
- Prudence helps us to see what aids our salvation and what hinders our progress. Supernatural prudence may involve a certain degree of discomfort or even risk of the things that we cherish. We seek first the Kingdom of God by following the example of Christ.
- Prudence aids us in not going along with evil in the event that we do not know what to do or because we are afraid of the consequences of opposition to the prevailing point of view.

Prudence

Saint Thomas Aquinas

"Thomas Aquinas defined prudentia as recta ratio agibillium, right reason in dealing with actions, or right practical reason. It is not some quality which is brought to deliberations when there is danger or a great deal at stake, as if the ordinary decisions of life didn't require much prudence. What he had in mind (and took from Aristotle) was a virtue or developed ability which enables an agent to make and carry out good decisions."

Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas, Book by Daniel Westberg; Oxford University, 1994. 283 pgs.



Statue: Mundelein Seminary, Mundelein, ILL.

St. Thomas Aquinas



Window: Blessed Sacrament Church, La Crosse, WI

His Life

- Thomas Aquinas went to school at Monte Cassino, Italy, the Benedictine Abbey.
- By age 11, Thomas was so advanced, he was able to study at Naples University.
- While in Naples, Italy, Thomas tried to join the Dominican friars at the age of 15 but the Dominicans asked him to come back when he turned 18.
- When Thomas Aquinas joined the Dominicans, his family was unhappy. They had planned for Thomas to become a Benedictine monk and head of Monte Cassino. So they "kidnapped" him from the Dominicans, holding him prisoner for 1 ½ years. After his sisters helped him escape, Thomas spoke with the Pope who promised that no one would interfere with his life as a Dominican.
- Thomas went to Cologne, Germany to study under the teacher, Albert the Great. Because Thomas was quiet, slow, solemn, big and strong he was given the title of 'the dumb ox.'
- Albert took Thomas to Paris to study at the University. Thomas received his Bachelors Degree in Theology. After 4 years of teaching, Thomas went back to Paris to receive his degree as a Doctor of Theology.
- Thomas wrote about Catholic Church doctrine in *Summa Theologica*, one of the finest presentations of the truths of the Faith ever written.
- Thomas spent his life examining the relationship between faith and reason.
- Thomas had several conversations with God and was blessed with a glimpse of Heaven which made him eager to be in that wonderful place!

How is Saint Thomas Aquinas a model of Prudence?

- Thomas used good discernment and right judgment in choosing to join the Dominican Order whose ministry was to preach, teach and convert students and professors from error. He was thus able to use his particular God-given gift of intelligence that was influenced by prudence to form others in the Faith.
- Thomas made Church prayers, the Epistles of Saint Paul, and Church doctrine accessible to the common person empowering them to make good and practical decisions in accord with God's will for their life.
- Thomas wholeheartedly believed in the True Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist through his superior intelligence inclined by the supernatural virtue of prudence allowing him to write beautiful hymns for benediction such as 'O Salutaris' and 'Tantum Ergo' ...inspiring others to believe in the True Presence as well.

FAST FACTS

Also Known As:

Doctor of the Church
The Angelic Doctor
The Dumb Ox
The Universal Teacher
Patron Saint of Catholic Schools
Patron Saint of academics
Patron Saint of scholars
Patron Saint of students
Patron Saint of theologians
Patron Saint of universities

Feast Day:

January 28

Practices to foster the growth of the virtue of prudence

- Prayer to Saint Thomas Aquinas
O Blessed Thomas, Patron of Schools, obtain for us from God an invincible faith, a burning charity, a chaste life, and true knowledge, through Christ Our Lord. Amen.
- A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do good. Our task is to ask for and cooperate with God's grace in developing the virtue of temperance, and allowing Him to perfect it in us. In addition to studying the Catholic Faith, determine who in your life will offer you good counsel in order to help you develop the virtue of prudence.
- Name some people from the Bible who lived by the virtue of prudence. Examples: Queen Esther in the Book of Esther, St. Paul in his dealing with other cultures
- Read a book about a Saint and report to the class how this person models the virtue of prudence. Examples: St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Benedict,
- As a class, read about a Saint and together discuss how this person models the virtue of prudence.
- Make a list of words that define prudence from page one. Name some prudent people. What do these people say or do that indicates that they are prudent?
- Using the "Praying with Scripture" (*Lectio Divina*) prayer worksheet, take ten minutes to pray with a Scripture passage.
Matthew 7:24-29 The wise man builds his house on the Rock, Who is Christ
Acts 6:1-7 The appointment of assistants who are spiritual and prudent
- How would someone know you are prudent and that you model the virtue of prudence?
Example: When facing a decision, you take time to pray and determine God's will in the matter. You always take the time to think things through to choose the "right" thing to do.
- Discuss how the First Commandment requires us to nourish and protect our faith with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it. (See CCC 2086-2087)
- How does conscience relate to the virtue of prudence? (See CCC 1786 – 1788). Example: You use your properly formed conscience to choose right from wrong in making decisions.
- Explain the relationship between faith and reason in your own words.
The principles of Thomas Aquinas on the relations between faith and reason are:
 1. Reason alone is not sufficient to guide people, they also need Revelation. Revelation is all that God has revealed to us in Sacred Tradition (teachings of the Church) and Scripture.
 2. Reason and Revelation are not opposed to each other.
 3. Faith preserves reason from error.
 4. Reason provides service in the cause of faith by explaining and helping to develop understanding of the truths of Faith and by defending the truths revealed by God.
- How do we know when we're exercising prudence and when we're simply giving in to our own desires?
In the Modern Catholic Dictionary, three stages of an act of prudence are noted: "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."
- Why would it be imprudent to disregard the advice or warnings of others? Example: Someone may have a better understanding of the situation that could help me in making a good decision.

- Prayer to Saint Thomas to obtain a special favor:
Dear Saint Thomas, gentlest of saints, you loved Jesus so tenderly and wrote so well of Him that He made you the glory of the Church and a shining star in the Order of St. Dominic. Encouraged by your kindness and charity, I beg you to obtain this favor that I now ask. (State your request along with: To grow in the virtue of prudence.) Plead my cause with your beloved Jesus, so that I may serve Him faithfully in this life and enjoy Him forever in Heaven. Amen.
- Read a Scripture passage on prudence. Re-read the passage and pick a word or phrase that stood out for you.

<i>Proverbs 2</i>	The Blessings of Wisdom
<i>Proverbs 4</i>	Wisdom: the Supreme Guide of Men
<i>Proverbs 8</i>	The Discourse of Wisdom
<i>Proverbs 13</i>	Prudence is Wisdom in action
<i>Proverbs 16</i>	Wisdom is better than gold
<i>Proverbs 29</i>	A wise man does not give full vent to his anger
- Each week, memorize a line or passage from a Proverb or another Scripture that relate specifically to the virtue of prudence. Examples:

<i>Proverbs 3:21</i>	My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion; let them not escape from your sight.
<i>Proverbs 14:15</i>	The simple believes everything, but the prudent looks where he is going.
<i>Proverbs 14:18</i>	The simple acquire folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.
<i>Proverbs 15:5</i>	A fool despises his father's instruction, but he who feeds admonition is prudent.
<i>Proverbs 16:21</i>	The wise of heart is called a man of discernment, and pleasant speech increases persuasiveness.
<i>Proverbs 18:15</i>	An intelligent mind acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.
<i>Hosea 14:9</i>	Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.
<i>Matthew 10:16</i>	Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.
<i>Ephesians 5:15</i>	Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise.
<i>Colossians 4:5</i>	Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.

The Prudence of Jesus Christ

“As a woman had shared in the fall of man, so woman should share in his redemption. In no better way could Our Lord reveal woman’s role in the new order than by giving John, that disciple whom He loved above the others, to His Mother whom He loved above all: ‘Son! Behold thy Mother... Woman! Behold thy son!’

The Kingdom of God was born! Heavenly prudence had chosen the right means to reveal the new ties born of redemption. Mary was to be our Mother, and we her children.”

(The Seven Virtues, Most Rev. Fulton J. Sheen
Garden City Books pages 45-46)

Additional Resources on the virtue of prudence

Pre-School through Third Grade

- *Book of Saints, Part 3*, Lovasik, Father Lawrence, S.V.D., Catholic Book Publishing Corp, 1993.
- *Saints and Heroes for Kids*, Pochocki, Ethel, Bethlehem Books
- *Book of Saints for Catholic Children*, 96 Illustrated Stories, Lord, Fr. Daniel, William J. Hirten Co.

Fourth Grade through Eighth Grade

- *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, The Story of the “Dumb Ox”, Windeatt, Mary Fabyan, Tan Books and Publishers, 800-437-5876.
- *Best-Loved Saints*, Lovasik, Fr. Lawrence G. S.V.D., Catholic Book Publishing Corp. (4 or 5 pages each)
- *Saint of the Day, Lives, Lessons, Feasts*, Foley, Leonard, O.F.M., McCloskey, Pat, O.F.M., St. Anthony Messenger Press.

Ninth Grade through Twelfth Grade

- *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, The Story of the “Dumb Ox”, Windeatt, Mary Fabyan, Tan Books and Publishers.
- *Saint Thomas Aquinas, The Dumb Ox*, Maritain, Raissa, Sophia Institute Press, 1-800-888-9344.
- *St. Thomas Aquinas*, Chesterton, G.K., The Catholic Company, 866-522-8465.
- *Praying in the Presence of Our Lord with Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Aquilina, Mike, The Catholic Company.
- *Summa Theologica, A Concise Translation*, Aquinas, St. Thomas, McDermott, Timothy
- *Aquinas - Selected Writings*, Aquinas, St. Thomas, McInerney, Ralph as Translator
- *Memorize the Faith*, Vost, Kevin, The Catholic Company, 866-522-8465.
- *Aquinas – On Reasons for Our Faith*, Fehlner, Father Peter Damian, FI, The Catholic Company.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,
 - As a Cardinal Virtue, paragraphs 1805-1806
 - The Common Good demands Prudence, paragraph 1906
 - The Definition of Prudence, paragraphs 1806, 1835
 - In Moral Judgments and in Decisions, paragraph 1788

Teacher and Parent Resources

- *The Virtue Driven Life*, Groeschel, Father Benedict J, C.F.R.
- *The Heart of Virtue*, DeMarco, Donald, Ignatius Press.
- *The Many Faces of Virtue*, DeMarco, Donald, Emmaus Road Publishing.
- *Character Building: A Guide for Parents and Teachers*, Isaacs, David.
- *Back to Virtue*, Kreeft, Peter, 1986

“Prudence is concerned with the quest of truth, and fills us with the desire of fuller knowledge.”
St. Ambrose