

## **Restoring the Place of Prudence**

*By Deacon Tim Sullivan*

Having discussed the three theological virtues, we will now turn our attention to the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. They are called “cardinal” virtues because all the other virtues are derived from them.

There isn't much that is more important in raising children than successfully instructing them on prudence. Our culture values intelligence and information but with great frequency ignores the central role of prudence. Decision making in our time is too often based on feelings, spontaneity, pleasure and what is popular.

The Catechism defines prudence as “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 person, in deciding whether or not to commit a certain act, will reflect on whether the object of the act is truly good for them or not.

In determining whether an act is good or not, a person should be guided by a well-formed conscience. The Catechism tells us that a well-formed conscience “is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator.” To function properly, our conscience is guided by the Word of God, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, advice from those who can be trusted and by the authoritative teachings of the Church.

Prudence requires logical thinking before taking action, asking questions such as “Is this action truly good for me? What will be the consequences of the action I am considering?” With prudence, our lives have an order, a structure, to them. Without prudence, our lives become unstable, inconsistent and directionless.

*“And if riches be a desirable possession in life, what is more rich than Wisdom, who produces all things? And if prudence renders service, who in the world is a better craftsman than she?”  
Wisdom 8:5-6*