

## **One**

### **The Steps to Making a Prudent Decision**

There are seven virtues from which all good actions flow: the Cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance and then the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.

Prudence is the first of the Cardinal virtues. It's the virtue every other virtue depends on because doing the good depends on knowing what the good actually is.

Prudence, like all the other virtues, also takes practice. You don't become prudent overnight, but if you work at it, eventually you get better at making smart, informed decisions that make you happier and holier and serve God and neighbor.

Now when you practice anything, you especially want to focus on your weakest area. That always needs the most attention.

So we're going to go over the three steps of making a prudent, wise decision, and as we do, pay attention and see which of the steps is your weak spot. Then make a resolution to ask for God's grace to do a better job with that part of this most fundamental human virtue and practice it.

## **Two**

### **Step One: Deliberation**

The first step of prudence, of making a good decision is gathering and considering the information available. This is called deliberation. It's where you think things through, think about the moral principles, think about the facts of the situation, sift the relevant information from the

irrelevant information. Because some facts are more important than others in terms of how they factor into the decision you need to make.

Also, you don't just deliberate by yourself, especially if it's a big decision. You pray, you ask for the Holy Spirit's gift of counsel, you consult other wise, holy persons. And you take a reasonable amount of time, depending on how serious the decision is, before you settle on a course of action.

This is difficult for some people. Many of us suffer from the vice of rashness. This is where we're intellectually lazy and unreflective, or where we just can't handle the waiting, the lack of closure, the effort of trying to reach a good decision. So instead of thinking it through, we rush into a decision. This is death to prudence, and so death to virtue. If you act without thinking, you will ruin your life and the lives of others.

Think before you act! That's the first rule of prudence and the first step of prudence. Don't skip the stage of deliberation.

## **Three**

### **Step Two: Judgment**

Some people *are* willing to gather data and think about it forever. In fact, they deliberate so long that they never make a decision, they never get to the second step of prudence, which is judgment.

This is where you actually come to a decision, where you say, "I'm going to do *this*."

People who never arrive at the point of making a decision suffer from the vice of indecision. There's a lot of this today: analysis paralysis, beating about the bush...

People are worried about committing to a particular course so they just sit around wondering what they should do, and eventually, the urge to do anything dissipates and the chance for good is gone.

There has to be a time for consideration and deliberation. But that time has to come to an end, and then it's time to make a decision, a choice. If you don't make it to the second stage of prudence, then virtue never gets underway.

## **Four**

### **Step Three: Execution**

Finally, the third act of prudence is when you stop thinking about what you *should do* or what you *will do* and you actually **do it**.

In step two, judgment, making a decision, you form your resolution. In step three, execution, you carry out that resolution.

Unfortunately, perhaps the biggest obstacle to prudence today is the vice opposed to execution. It's called the vice of inconstancy or irresolutness and it consists in being unable to carry out your resolutions, the inability to follow through.

There are all kinds of people like this. They 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, then they change their minds and decide to do that major. The same happens in the case of jobs, or vocations. It's really tragic, because the movement of truth is stifled. It never finds its way into active expression. These folks can't commit. And because they can't commit, they can't really love or be excellent, since neither love nor excellence is possible without commitment.

Don't let this happen to you. Take time, consider the information available, and seek counsel. Then decide. And then make sure you do what you have decided to do.

## **Five**

### **Which Do You Need to Work On?**

So which of these areas do you need to work on?

Are you thoughtless and rash? Then slow down, think, and give more time than you usually do, more than you're comfortable with before you decide and take action – say, twenty-four hours – before you rush into anything in private or professional life.

Are you indecisive? Then set strict deadlines to limit how much you hem and haw before coming to a decision, a *judgment*. Don't let your own lack of certainty or confidence hold you back from pursuing what is good.

Are you irresolute? Then be very careful about your resolutions, but once you have made one, try not to think about it anymore. Just do what you have said you would do. Follow through on your commitments. Make it so other people can count on your word because *you* come through when you say you will.

This is prudence. This is the foundation of truth that undergirds the whole moral life. And practice makes perfect. So ask God to show us what we need to work on, and ask Him for the grace to improve, then practice!