

Prudence 10-11-15 Lindsay

Father Jim Pemberton, who I think most of you knew used to say, 'God gave you common sense. He expects you to use it.' And then there is the sort of smart-alecky saying, 'The thing about common sense is that it ain't common'. I'm here to tell you that common sense is common. We all have it or in the case of small children, we are developing it. No, it is as Fr Jim infers, present but not used.

Think about all the times in your life when you have gotten into trouble. Or caused yourself problems or done yourself harm. In the vast majority of cases the reason is the failure to use common sense. Oftentimes the failure to use common sense is caused by greed or laziness. I know that's true in my own life. An illustration of this is what I saw on the news Friday night. A guy was fired from his job at a fast food joint in Dallas. So, this genius comes back to the restaurant several hours later and robs the place. All the employees knew who he was, so he was caught minutes after the police came. His take was less than \$100. This is a brilliant example of imprudence.

Prudence is one of the cardinal virtues. Prudence may be practiced by anyone, not just believing Christians. For example, the young man who made the unwise decision to rob the place he was working at just a few hours

before could have made the prudent decision not to rob the place simply because he could have had the judgment that it was too risky. This would have been prudent. But it wouldn't have been a theological virtue. A theological virtue is given, by God's grace as an understanding that the action taken would be unwise because it is displeasing to God.

Another illustration is cheating in school. A student might not cheat because of fear of the consequences if caught. But a deeper understanding of why it is right not to cheat is that it is displeasing to God, even if the cheater isn't caught. So, it goes through the Ten Commandments. It is good to obey the commandments out of fear. It is better to obey them out of love. If we only obey out of fear then we are open to the temptation that we will disobey if fear is absent: if we think there is a good possibility of not getting caught. If we obey out of love, we are not open to this temptation. We get caught, so to speak, no matter what because God is always watching.

It takes children awhile to get their arms around this concept. There is a very cute video on youtube of a little girl with chocolate smeared all over her face. There is a chocolate donut missing. The mother asks the girl, 'Did you eat the donut?' The girl answers, 'No'. The mother says, 'Well, what happened to the donut?' The girl answers, 'Tommy ate it'. (Tommy is her little brother who, conveniently is too young to speak.) The mother has a hand mirror and

holds it up to the daughter. 'Why do you have chocolate all over your face?' The little girl doesn't give up yet! 'Tommy hit me with the donut before he ate it.' Poor Tommy! He's been thrown under the bus two times and he doesn't even know it.

This video illustrates very well the immature conscience. The idea for the little girl is, 'Don't get caught!' Her conscience hasn't developed to the point of being able to understand right from wrong as anything more than getting caught or not getting caught. If she doesn't get caught, everything's cool. If she does get caught, disaster. Very simple. Don't get caught.

The mature conscience one that prods it's owner to do what's right independent of immediate consequences. 'Consequences' isn't just a function of staying clear of the police or the authorities. 'Consequences' includes eternal costs in the analysis. But we haven't given perfect satisfaction yet. 'Consequences' as rightly understood means not wishing to disappoint the people we love and whose good opinion we value. But we aren't there yet. 'Consequences' as perfectly understood means not wanting to disappoint Almighty God. Disappointing God is the consequence we should dread the most.

The classic Act of Contrition expresses this quite well, ' O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all-good and deserving of all my love.'

So, we should hate sin because of fear of punishment, that's a very good reason but mainly because they offend God.

The author of the book of Wisdom says in our first reading today, ' I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.' So, we are told how to get prudence. We ask. How do we ask? We pray. God will give us prudence as a theological virtue if we ask. But it isn't something that is given once and for all. It is something like a plant that is nurtured and watered and taken care of. If we neglect it, like a plant it will die. This is the Catholic idea of conversion. We are constantly in need of conversion. We are constantly in need of help to stay virtuous.

Always remember, without God's help it is impossible.