

PRUDENCE BUILDS HONESTY

H O N E S T Y

CHAPTER THREE

KEYWORDS

Prudence: From the Latin word “providentia,” which means providence. Providence is God’s divine will (plan) for our life. Prudence helps us know God’s plan. To distinguish right from wrong and true from lies.

Duplicity: Deception by pretending to entertain one set of intentions while acting under the influence of another.

Dissimulation: To conceal one’s true feelings or intentions.

Hypocrisy: The practice of professing beliefs, feelings, or virtues that one does not hold or possess. An expression of agreement that is not supported by real conviction. Pretending to have qualities or beliefs that you do not really have.

MAIN POINTS

- There is only one truth.
- God keeps His word; the word became flesh.
- What is truth?
- The father of lies
- All people naturally strive for what is good.
- Focus in the midst of distractions.
- We must testify to the truth.
- Life without the truth
- Trusting in the truth
- Expecting much from God

Lesson Plan

How useful is a map if the destination on the map is false? Prudence helps us know there is only one destination, one truth, and that truth can be trusted. In a world in which truth is considered relative to the situation, prudence helps us discern the truth, distinguishing it from among the lies. Prudence enables us to imitate Christ and be a witness to the way, the truth, and the life. Ultimately, prudence is the key to freedom. With prudence we find truth and learn to trust in the truth, which will set us free. Something cannot be both true and not true. For example, the sky cannot be both blue and not blue. There is only one truth. Because there is

only one truth, truth can be trusted. “For the Lord is an eternal Rock.”³⁰ Because God is truth and is both solid and stable like a rock, we can say with confidence, “My refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust.”³¹ In an unstable world with rapid change, we put our trust in the promise of an unchanging God. “For he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever.”³² God promised the Israelites, and through them all people, that He would give His mercy.

We expect people to keep their word. Not only did God keep His word, but “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace

³⁰ Isaiah 26:4

³¹ Psalm 91:2

³² Luke 1:54–55

³³ John 1:14

and truth.”³³ Jesus Christ, the Son of God, full of grace and truth, is the promise of God’s mercy to all. St. Maria Faustina, a Polish nun who lived from 1905 to 1938, was given these words by Christ: “Sooner would heaven and earth turn into nothingness than would My mercy not embrace a trusting soul.”³⁴ The heavens and earth will not turn to nothingness and God’s mercy will always embrace the trusting soul that makes space for God’s embrace.

What is truth? Each person, like Pontius Pilate, asks this question of himself and of Christ. So Pilate said to him, “Then you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him. “What is truth?”³⁵ With the fullness of truth standing right in his face, Pilate asks the question, “What is truth?” The thirst for absolute truth, which caused Pilate to ask, “what is truth?” is the same thirst in the depth of every heart. “No darkness or error of sin can totally take away from man the light of God the Creator. In the depths of his heart there always remains a yearning for absolute truth and a thirst to attain full knowledge of it.”³⁶ Although Christ was right in front of Pilate, Pilate was looking elsewhere. He was inward looking, worried about himself. Like Pilate, “when a culture becomes inward looking, and tries to perpetuate obsolete ways of living by rejecting any exchange or debate with regard to the truth about man, then it becomes sterile and is heading for decadence.”³⁷

Sadly, the forces of evil distort the truth. Referring to Satan, St. John wrote, “You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies.”³⁸ Satan is the father of lies and “by deceiving man he leads him to projects of sin and death, making them appear as goals and fruits of life.”³⁹ All men seek the good and strive to accomplish the good. Satan knows this and thus makes what is evil appear to be good. Hitler and others who have committed

horrific evils believed they were pursuing what was good. They of course had a false view of good and were thus misguided. Some believe that evil may be committed in order that good may result from it; however, this view is contrary to the truth. An evil action may never be committed whether good may result from it or not. Evil is the deprivation of good. When evil is committed, God wills to restore the good, thus redeeming what was lost, but we must not put God to this test. Satan comes to deceive and has deceived mankind from the beginning. God however is “not a deceiver that He should offer to support us, and then, when we lean upon Him, should slip away from us.”⁴⁰ Satan, our opponent, “is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”⁴¹ We must resist him, keeping our focus on the truth and on our goal, and live the words of Blessed John the XXIII, who told us to think not about our frustrations, but our hopes and our dreams, not about our failings, but our unfulfilled potential. We are a people with our vocation in the making, and prudence keeps us focused on that vocation as we live in a world of distractions.

Man, by his very nature, seeks the truth, and once that truth is found, he must adhere to that truth. “It is in accordance with their dignity that all men, because they are persons . . . are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth once they come to know it and direct their whole lives in accordance with the demands of truth.”⁴² “Since God is true, the members of his people are called to live in the truth.”⁴³ We are called to imitate Christ. Christ said to Pontius Pilate, “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”⁴⁴ As Christians then, we too must testify to the truth, the one truth. “Truth and truthfulness is the virtue, which consists in showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, and guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy.”⁴⁵ In order to practice prudence to a heroic degree, we must be people of truth in word and deed. It is not enough simply doing the will of God, but to do the will of God how God wills it and when God wills it. The last words

³⁴ *Diary*, St. Maria Faustina, 1777

³⁵ John 18:38

³⁶ *Veritatis Splendor*, 1.3

³⁷ *Centesimus Annus*, 50.2

³⁸ John 8:44

³⁹ *Evangelium Vitae*, 53.3

⁴⁰ *Voices of the Saints*, Saint Augustine

⁴¹ 1 Peter 5:8

⁴² CCC, 2467

⁴³ CCC, 2465

⁴⁴ John 18:37

⁴⁵ CCC, 2505

of St. Gerard Megella were, “Here the will of God is done as God wills and as God wants.” St. Elizabeth Ann Seton spoke to her Sisters of Charity with the same words: “I propose we do the will of God, when God wills it and how God wills it.”

“Let your yes mean yes and your no mean no.”⁴⁶ Duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy lead only to chaos and confusion. What would our world be like if everything changed from day to day? If one day $2 + 2 = 4$ but the next day it equaled 10, all laws of mathematics would collapse. If one day a rock fell to the ground adhering to the laws of gravity, but the next day it didn’t, we would have to relearn the laws of physics. Without truth, we can’t go in any direction, because the direction we travel would be traveled in vain. Without truth, the direction traveled could be subject to change, leaving us with confusion and disorder. “The honesty of the upright guides them; the faithless are ruined by their duplicity.”⁴⁷

What is true can be trusted, because it is constant. The virtue of prudence, consistently practiced, leads to honesty, which enables us to be trusted. Jesus tells us that, “The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones.”⁴⁸ The relationship between honesty and trust is essential to human relationships. “Men could not live with one another if there were not mutual confidence that they were being truthful to one another . . . as a matter of honor, one man owes it to another to manifest the truth.”⁴⁹ This honesty and trust is one of the bedrocks of the morals God gave us in the Ten Commandments. “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”⁵⁰ “The eighth commandment forbids misrepresenting the truth in our

relations with others. This moral prescription flows from the vocation of the holy people to bear witness to their God who is the truth and wills the truth.”⁵¹

Honesty and trust go hand in hand. If we put our trust in what is false we will be disappointed. This is why the Psalmist says, “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put one’s trust in mortals, it is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put one’s trust in princes.”⁵² Trust is the vessel in which we accept truth. It is when we trust that Christ tells us, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”⁵³ St. Maria Faustina wrote in her diary the words of Christ. “The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is—trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive. Souls that trust boundlessly are a great comfort to Me, because I pour all the treasures of My graces into them. I rejoice that they ask for much, because it is My desire to give much, very much. On the other hand, I am sad when souls ask for little, when they narrow their hearts.”⁵⁴ We must not only trust in the truth, but we must increase our trust daily. Because the truth, which is God, is inexhaustible, the trust we have in the truth is also inexhaustible. “All things upon which you set your trust are yours. Do expect much of God, and He will do much for you. Expect but little, and He will do little.”⁵⁵ This inexhaustible trust in the truth is for all times, past, present, and future, and virtue for life. “Trust the past to the Mercy of God, the present to His Love, and the future to His Providence.”⁵⁶

⁴⁶ Matthew 5:37

⁴⁷ Proverbs 11:3

⁴⁸ Luke 16:10

⁴⁹ *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*

⁵⁰ Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20

⁵¹ CCC, 2464

⁵² Psalm 118:8–9

⁵³ John 8:32

⁵⁴ *Diary, St. Maria Faustina, 1578*

⁵⁵ *Voices of the Saints, St. Bernard*

⁵⁶ *Voices of the Saints, St. Bernard*

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON HONESTY

H O N E S T Y

CHAPTER THREE

1. In what ways is our world always changing?
2. In what ways is God unchanging?
3. List as many truths as you can think of. Truths that are always true and never change?
4. At our baptism, the vow is made to reject all of Satan's empty promises. These empty promises are lies. List some empty promises/lies Satan presents to society and to us.
5. What happens when a person stops searching for the truth? Imagine a detective who stopped searching for a criminal or a reporter who didn't care to get the whole story. What would be the result?
6. Why is it sometimes hard to follow the truth once it has been found?
7. List some ways our physical life would be different if things were not stable.
8. List some things that must be stable if our spiritual life is going to be solid.
9. Give an example in which you were honest and good in a small matter and were then given a greater responsibility.
10. What are practical everyday ways people bear false witness?
11. In what areas do you lack trust in God? Why?
12. In what areas do you have great trust in God? Why?
13. What do you expect from God? Make a list of as many expectations as you can think of. Of the things on your list, which do you trust God will do?