

Good evening my brethren, and welcome to a new year. Worshipful Gregory has informed me that part of his 2020 “vision” the theme will be connected to the perfect points of a mason as well as the Cardinal virtues. This month my talk will be a primer for things to come.

Our ritual teaches that there are four cardinal virtues Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice. In addition to these four cardinal virtues which correspond not only to the perfect points of a mason, but also to the four liberal arts and sciences of the quadrivium namely arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy.

In a previous lecture, I referenced the trivium, which were grammar rhetoric and logic. This group of sciences also has its own set of connected virtues which are classified as the theological virtues and are also very familiar to us being those virtues of faith, hope and charity. Like the original orders of architecture, to the Greeks are we indebted for the four Cardinal virtues, as they were created by Greek philosophers for the benefit of all people seeking to live moral lives.

Temperance is commonly defined as the practice of self-control, discretion and moderation. It has been symbolically depicted in many ways, as a wheel, a cup, a bridle and reins, and even as two jugs, one with water, one with wine. Keep this last image in mind as you listen to the Junior Warden’s duties in the south when he keeps the craft from intemperance or excess during refreshment.

Fortitude, typically represented as armor, a palm or a tower, can also be classified as courage and is defined as the ability to confront fear, uncertainty and intimidation. There can be no better example of fortitude than that taught by the second half of the MM degree.

Prudence is the ability to discern the appropriate course of action to a given situation at the appropriate time. Frequently represented by a book, scroll or mirror, this virtue is vital for us to keep in mind in our daily interactions. Think of the Charge at the closing of a MM lodge, which references remind our brothers and aid a reformation, prudence is the virtue that makes do so in the most friendly manner.

Justice, the balance and scales, the fiery sword, or occasionally the swift foot can all represent this virtue which epitomizes fairness. Some consider this one of the most important virtue; the Greek word also means righteousness. In classical times this virtue was the rule of the relationship of the classes or divisions of man and stood outside of the class system. The other three aligned to one of the three: Prudence to the ruling class, Fortitude to the warrior class, and temperance was common to all but most closely connected to the producing class, including craftsmen.

Finally Brethren, a helpful tip that has helped me remember these virtues during our classes, it’s a visual, so if I haven’t put you to sleep, look this way.



‘The Winding Staircase – Further steps on the path to improving yourself in Masonry’
By: Michael J. Caro, LEO, Tuckahoe Lodge No. 347 ***1-20***