



the messenger

The 12 Virtues Series

Information collected from around the globe.

Thanks to all contributors past and present!

The 12 Virtues of a Good Teacher - Wisdom

"Wisdom is a virtue that gives us knowledge of the most exalted things though the most excellent principles so that we may act accordingly."

"In what, then, does the Wisdom of a good teacher consist? It consists in making him know, love and fulfill the exalted and infinitely precious object for which he is responsible; from this it follows that a good teacher should begin by imitating the example of Solomon, who spoke humbly to the Author of all Good, the God of Knowledge, the Father of Lights: 'Give me . . . the Wisdom that sits by your throne . . . For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory' (Wisdom 9: 4, 11)."

A good teacher "would act imprudently if while teaching the students, he did not seek to instruct himself concerning what he wishes to teach them. . . . Wisdom will also show him and make him deeply cognizant not only of the truths he is obliged to teach but of the principles of these subjects."

"While imparting to them what he knows, he must take great care in particular not to tell them anything offensive or that might lead them to become ill disposed toward himself or the school."

"To instruct children with greater benefit, Wisdom requires that the teacher practice the virtues that he should cultivate in them. . . . He will, therefore, make sure to give them the example of what he wishes to teach them. . . ."

". . . he will strive, for his own sake and for the sake of instructing them, to distinguish what is truly good from what is such only in appearance. . . ."

". . . he will lead them to choose rightly and to persevere in every enlightened choice; to arrange all things with order and measure; in a word, to fulfill exactly their duties toward God, toward themselves, and toward others."



A Question:

How do you share your perspective, which comes from experience, in a way that young people will hear?



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Wisdom

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For Reflection

What statement speaks especially to you and your educational responsibilities?

What does this virtue look like in action?

How does one exercise wisdom towards oneself?

How do you know when your wisdom is effective?

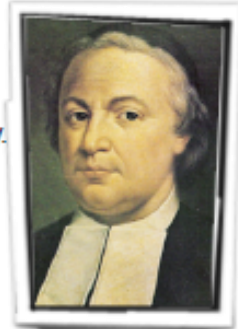
How do you know when your wisdom is ineffective?



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WISDOM

A virtue that gives us knowledge of the most exalted things through the most excellent principles so that we may act accordingly.



Strategy 0-1: Learning from Great Teachers

Purpose: To refresh and learn from great teachers.

Description: Through reflection, beliefs and values to provide a wisdom base for our understanding of what teaching is.

In a fantasy world, all students would march in on the first day of school, quietly seat themselves, and promptly look up, bright-eyed, ready and willing to get to work. But this is the real world. In this world, students show up with a variety of motivations, such as

1. *The fully active learners.* Some students will be ready and willing to dive into school work. When we assign four problems for homework, such students will not only do all four but do them with style. They might even recopy their work before handing it in, so it's very neat, or attach a cover sheet to make it look professional. Students in this category may not be the brightest in the classroom, and they may not get the highest exam scores. But they are our go-getters, self-motivated, ready to do the best work they possibly can. These students are a joy to teach.
2. *The responsible students.* Other students will enter the classroom ready to do whatever we ask, but not much more than that. When we assign these students four problems for homework, they will do all four carefully, but rarely will we get the sense that they did their very best. These are dutiful, respectful students, more motivated to please us than to put themselves fully into their work. These students are easy enough to teach.
3. *The halfhearted workers.* Our class is also likely to contain students who are, at best, halfhearted workers. Give them four problems and they complete only two. Or, if they do all four, their work will be sloppy, full of careless errors. These students are often slow to start work and quick to give up, and they can be quite frustrating to teach.
4. *The work avoiders.* Finally, we might have students who will do little or no work. Indeed, some will do their best to avoid work altogether. Give these students four problems for homework and they are likely to groan and then lose the assignment. They are the students most likely to become discipline problems, the ones most likely to drive us batty.

This is the array of motivations that we are likely to find when our students first arrive. Unfortunately, it is also the array of motivations we are likely to see in the last days of the school year. Despite all the books that have been written about motivation and all the teacher meetings devoted to the issue, most of us still have a hard time turning work avoiders and halfhearted workers into responsible students and fully active learners.

But this is not so for all teachers...

Learning from Great Teachers

Some teachers, those we might call our great teachers, have a knack for moving students up those motivational levels. If we visited their classrooms, we would see, week by week, fewer and fewer students working at levels three and four, more and more at levels one and two. Somehow these teachers are able to inspire students to work harder than they were initially inclined to work. As a result the students tend to climb what we call the Active Learning Ladder



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You probably remember having such teachers yourself. Most schools have at least a few. They are the ones who elicit such comments from students as

- I like coming to class. I hated being absent.
- She turned us on to history and made it come alive.
- I never worked so hard in my life.
- I didn't expect to like that class, but I really did.

We might reasonably conclude, therefore, that it is possible to inspire students to become more fully active learners. Clearly, some teachers manage to do it. Might we do it, too? If so, how?

Interestingly, those great teachers don't achieve their results in any standard way. Look at a group of great teachers and you will notice that some do a lot of lecturing, others very little. Some are strict and demanding, others lenient and accepting. Some appear warm, others to be distant. Apparently, there is no one way to motivate students to do the best work they are capable of doing. This is good news for those who would like to inspire active learning. It suggests that we need not change our teaching personality or follow any standard model. Rather, we can create our own brand of teaching, motivating higher levels of active learning in our own way. That is assuming, of course, we have a clear, realistic sense of how to go about doing so.

One of the *unrealistic* suggestions bantered about would have us start with students' interests and base all instruction on topics students are already motivated to learn more about: space travel, baseball, popular music. Another suggestion would have us build units around real-life issues that naturally motivate students: making friends, staying healthy, encouraging world peace, or the like. A third suggestion recommends that we convince students of the importance of grammar, history, or whatever else we want to teach them, so that the students will want to learn it.

These suggestions can help some of the time with some topics and some students, but rarely are they sufficient to move a classroom of students steadily up the Active Learning Ladder. Students need to be touched more deeply if they are to be inspired to do the best work they are capable of doing.

The Active Learning Ladder

Level 1: Fully Active Learners
Level 2: Responsible Students
Level 3: Halfhearted Workers
Level 4: Work Avoiders

An Inspiring Approach

After years of experimentation, we have crafted a practical approach that does stir the deep positive abilities of students. Our approach resembles those that recommend a focus on the natural needs of students.

Yet our approach is distinct in several ways. First, our focus is squarely on the *highest* needs of students, such as the need for students to become fully functioning or to be the best persons they can be. It does not ignore other needs, including what Maslow (1999) calls students' *deficiency needs*, such as the need for food and safety. But we place those needs in the background. We want to concentrate on the heart of the matter, on bringing out the very best students have in them, which often includes positive qualities the students themselves do not yet know they possess. In this regard, we agree with Erich Fromm when he says that the heart of education is "helping the child realize his potentialities." By aiming high we also take advantage of Goethe's wisdom: "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being."

A second key difference in our approach is that our target is not to bring our students' best potentials in a general way. We are teachers. We have jobs to do. Our approach is grounded in classroom realities. Our target, then, is very practical: to see students apply their best potentials to *daily schoolwork*.



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A final difference is that our target is made more concrete and manageable by focusing on five student potentials that teachers have the power to influence and that directly contribute to school success. These five student abilities are *dignity, energy, self-management, community, and awareness*. We refer to them collectively as DESCAs.

FIVE KEY STUDENT ABILITIES

All students have an inherent ability to live with *dignity*, to engage tasks with *energy*, be appropriately *self-managing*, to work in *community* with at least some others, and to be *aware* of what is going on around them. Collectively, these DESCAs abilities point to the heart of students' best, most productive selves.

D is for Dignity

Students have an innate ability to live and work with dignity, as do we all. Moreover, deep down, students *want* to live and work with dignity. They do not want to feel belittled, demeaned, diminished, unimportant, unworthy. Yet traditional school practices can fail to take advantage of this ability to work with dignity. Some practices, in fact, frustrate students' impulses to do so. Our task, if we want to inspire students to be fully active learners, is to run our classrooms in a way that is comfortable to us, nourishing, never depressing, students' ability to work with dignity. We might, for example take care to

- Avoid embarrassing students, as by temporarily backing off when some feel blocked or are otherwise unable to learn what we are asking them to learn.
- Use only those discipline procedures that communicate care and high respect for students.
- Find practical ways to give students credit whenever they do the best they can, even when that falls far short of mastery.
- Announce high expectations without raising unproductive anxieties in low-ability students.

Practically speaking, can we do those things? Is it, for instance, realistic to expect us to avoid embarrassments and to discipline in ways that always communicate care? Yes, it is as strategies presented in these papers discussing the 12 virtues of a Good Teacher will explain.

E is for Energy

Students also have a natural ability to engage life energetically. They, in fact, *want* to engage life energetically. They suffer when they must sit still or stand around for too long with nothing much to do. We do well to nurture that ability to live energetically. It's after all what we, too, want. We certainly do not want students handling schoolwork apathetically or slumping in class listlessly. Nor do we want them running wildly out of control. Rather, we want students to engage schoolwork with a comfortable, steady flow of energy. To build on and draw out students' ability to do that, we might, for example

- Use very small groups, preferably pairs, to reduce chances that some students will be left uninvolved in group work.
- Adopt instructional procedures that allow students to occasionally move about so they can vent any built-up restlessness.
- Use whole-class choral work for information we want students to memorize.

S is for Self-Management

All humans also have the ability to self-manage, and we would do well to develop this in our students. We do not want students asking us every little question that comes to mind. Rather, we want them to think for themselves, managing themselves as intelligently as they can. This is what they, too, want. They do not want to be bossed. Nor do they want to fly about out of control. To nurture students' self-managing ability, we might



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- Include choices in each homework assignment; for example, give options on how many questions to answer or on how to handle a topic.
- Allow students to select their own work partners, chairs in the room, or focus for a small-group discussion.
- Ask each student to make a personal plan to tutor a younger student.

C Is for Community

Students, as do we all, have an ability to get along and relate comfortably with at least some others. And they want to do so. They do not want to be rejected or isolated. Rather, they want to be in community with at least some others. If, then, we want to elicit students' more cooperative and generous abilities, we might

- Structure lessons so students can often help one another.
- Encourage talkative students to create enough space for all students to be able to speak out.
- Set up support groups in which students learn to support one another over and extended time period.

A Is for Awareness

Finally, all students are aware beings. They have the ability to be alert, wakeful, observant, attentive. And they have an innate *longing* to be aware. They are not meant to be bored. Indeed, it is their very nature to *avoid* boredom. And we, of course, want students to stay alert and aware. That recommends we do not repress but rather develop this awareness ability. To do this, we might

- Find a way to help slower learners without boring faster learners.
- Change whatever we are doing whenever we notice student attention sliding, as by changing topics or procedures.
- Avoid having quick thinkers answer all our questions, as by having all students jot an answer on scrap paper or share answers in pairs before we discuss correct answers.
- Include activities students are highly interested in completing, as by asking students to construct a toothpick model of an idea, teach a concept to a younger student, or solve a real problem showing up in school.

Teachers have a great deal of control over the degree to which students will express those DESCA potentials and apply them to daily school work.

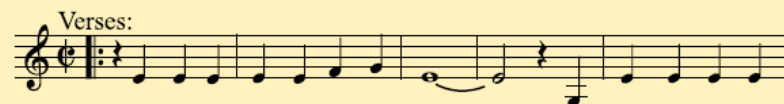


WISDOM

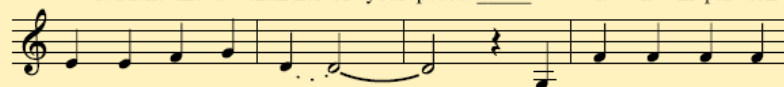
Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.

Make me a channel of your peace

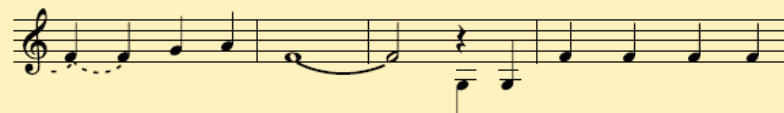
Verses:



1. Make me a chan-nel of your peace. _____ Where there is ha-tred,
 2. Make me a chan-nel of your peace. _____ Where there's de-spair in
 3. Make me a chan-nel of your peace. _____ it is in par-don-



1. let me bring your love. _____ Where there is in - ju-
 2. life, let me bring hope. _____ Where there is dark ness-
 3. ing that we are par doned, _____ in giv - ing of our.



1. ry, your par - don, Lord. _____ And where there's doubt true
 2. _____ on - ly light. _____ And where there's sad - ness.
 3. selves that we re - ceive. _____ and in dy - ing that we're

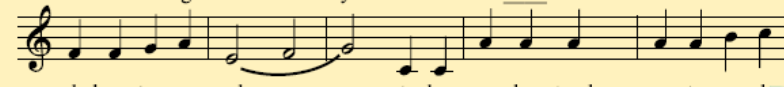


1. faith in you. _____ joy. _____
 2. ev - er _____
 3. born to e - ter - nal life. _____

REFRAIN:



Oh Mas ter grant that I may nev er seek _____ So much to be con-



soled as to con sole, _____ to be un der stood as to un - der-



stand, _____ To be loved, as to love, with all my soul. _____

Reading

from Brother Agathon 1785, translated by Brother Gerard Rummery 1998

Wisdom is a virtue which gives us knowledge of the most exalted things.

The good teacher will teach his students how to direct their actions in conformity with the true rules of behaviour; to moderate and correct their passions; to become truly and genuinely happy. He will strive to distinguish what is really good from what is such only in appearance; he will lead them to choose rightly and to persevere in every enlightened choice; to arrange all things with order and measure; in a word, to fulfill exactly their duties toward God, toward themselves, and toward others.



Our response

from The Book of Wisdom

Side One:

Learn what I teach you, my son, and never forget what I tell you to do. Listen to what is wise and try to understand it.

Side Two:

Yes, beg for knowledge; plead for insight. Look for it as hard as you would for silver or some hidden treasure.

Side One:

It is the Lord who gives wisdom; from him comes knowledge and understanding. He protects those who treat others fairly, and guards those who are devoted to him.

Side Two:

If you listen to me, you will know what is right, just and fair. You will become wise and your knowledge will give you pleasure.

Side One:

Never let yourself think that you are wiser than you are; simply obey the Lord and refuse to do wrong.

Side Two:

If you do, it will be like good medicine, healing your wounds and easing your pains.

Side One:

Happy is anyone who becomes wise, who gains understanding. Wisdom is more valuable than jewels; nothing you could want can compare with it.

Side Two:

Hold on to your wisdom and insight, my son. Never let them get away from you.

All:

Glory be to the Father Amen.

Pause for quiet reflection

Reading

from Meditations 91 and 170 by John Baptist de La Salle

Have you been careful to teach your students the maxims and practices of the holy Gospel and to see that they practise them? A teacher who has piety in his heart, says the Wise Man, will bring forth wisdom; that is, he will procure wisdom for himself and he will make those wise whom he instructs. It is in Holy Scripture that the outpourings of all the treasure of God's knowledge and wisdom are found. These are the divine books which the true servants of God must devour and be filled with in order to communicate their secrets.





Our response

from Letters 49, 85 and 113 of John Baptist de La Salle

Side One:

You should be most careful not to speak so haughtily, as you tell me you sometimes do. The Spirit of God does not allow that sort of talk.

Side Two:

So let humility and gentleness be always evident in whatever you say. Nothing will make you more pleasing to God and men than these two virtues.

Side One:

So never rebuff anyone; that gives very bad example. On the contrary, speak politely, which is altogether in keeping with the Spirit of God..

Side Two:

You say that often you don't know how to keep from speaking. You must try to learn this. It is great wisdom to know how to keep silence when the occasion requires it.

Side One:

You will find silence a very useful even a very necessary virtue, if you are to adore God, serve him in spirit and in truth, resist temptations, and save yourself from falling into sin.

Side Two:

You must learn how to be silent and to speak only when necessary. Always remain silent when others annoy you, and let God alone be the witness of your innocence.

All:

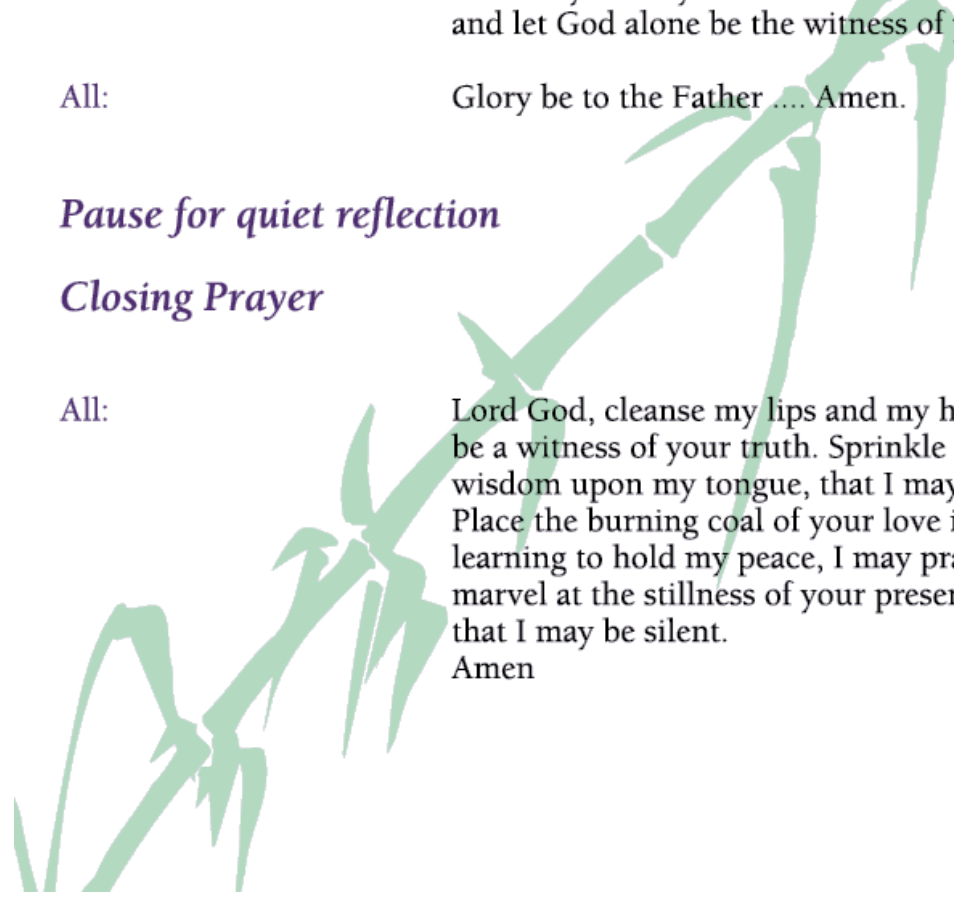
Glory be to the Father Amen.

Pause for quiet reflection

Closing Prayer

All:

Lord God, cleanse my lips and my heart that I may truly be a witness of your truth. Sprinkle the salt of your wisdom upon my tongue, that I may weigh my words. Place the burning coal of your love in my heart, so that learning to hold my peace, I may praise you and may marvel at the stillness of your presence. Speak, Lord! that I may be silent.
Amen





Our response

from The Letter of James

Side One:

Are there people among you who are wise and understanding? They are to prove it by their good lives, by their good deeds performed with humility and wisdom.

Side Two:

But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter and selfish, don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom.

Side One:

Such wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic.

Side Two:

Where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil.

Side One:

But the wisdom from above is pure first of all, it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly.

Side Two:

It is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy.

Side One:

And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace.

Side Two:

But if any of you lack wisdom, you should pray to God, who will give it to you; because God gives generously and graciously to all.

All:

Glory be to the Father Amen.

Pause for quiet reflection

Intercessions

Closing Prayer

All:

Lord, you have enriched our lives in many ways. Give us this day the wisdom to recognize which things are important and which things are not. Show us how best to use the time and talents you have given us. Help us to use all opportunities wisely that we may give in service to others the good gifts we have received from you. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen





Praise to the holiest

Praise to the ho- liest in the height, and in the depth be praise, in

all his words most won- der- ful, most sure in all his ways.

2. O loving wisdom of our God!

When all was sin and shame,
a second Adam to the fight,
and to the rescue came.

3. O wisest love! That flesh and blood
which did in Adam fail,
should strive afresh against the foe,
should strive and should prevail;

4. And that a higher gift than grace
should flesh and blood refine,
God's presence and his very self,
and Essence all divine.

5. O generous love! that he who smote

in man for man the foe,
the double agony in man
For man should undergo.

6. And in the garden secretly
and on the Cross on high,
should teach his brethren, and inspire
to suffer and to die.

7. Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise,
in all his words most wonderful,
most sure in all his ways.

John Henry Newman (1801-90)



He who knows others is learned; he who knows himself is wise. (Lao-Tze)
St. John Baptist de La Salle, pray for us. Live Jesus in our hearts, forever!



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**REFERENCES FOR
THIS ISSUE OF
"THE MESSENGER"
THE FOLLOWING ARE
KINDLY
ACKNOWLEDGED...**

- **Pages 1-2:**
Mr. Greg Kopra
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**MANY THANKS FOR
YOUR TIME, EFFORT
AND ENERGY IN THE
CREATION OF THESE
RESOURCES. YOUR
GIFT IS IMMENSE.**

**LIVE
Jesus
IN OUR
HEARTS
FOREVER**

Wisdoms' Riches

Once I taught a Form Four student and many teachers commented that he was getting worse and worse in conduct and studies because he was associating with some badly behaved students of his Form. Some even commented that he should not be given the chance to be promoted to Form five. I did not take any action as he always behaved properly in my lessons. However, I did observe his behaviour.

One day in early May, he played a trick on another student of his class by taking away his pencil case. However, there was insufficient evidence against him. This happened in the lesson before mine. Usually before my religious studies lesson, I have a moment of prayer in preparation for the lesson. That time I had a feeling that I had to do something. However, I did not take action immediately. During that lesson, he behaved as if he was innocent thinking that nobody could catch him through his smiles and murmurs. He grew bolder when I wrote notes on the blackboard. I prayed to God about whether I should take action. I felt I should. Finally, I turned to him and scolded him for his ignorant behaviour. After class I also talked to him for over an hour and counselled him using the story of the Lost Son. I advised him to forgo his friendship with those badly behaved students. His face changed from anger to regret and repentance.

After that, I occasionally checked with some other teachers about his behaviour in class. They noticed a good change in him. His eyes showed signs of new life. I also prayed that one month's time would be enough for him to improve academically for his final examination. Thanks be to God. He passed in the final examination and he got promoted to Form five.

After all, God's inspirations and wisdom are very useful guides to teachers and students. They let us know what is right and wrong, and help us to choose what is right and to hate what is evil. The virtue of wisdom, together with constant prayer, helps teachers and students a lot!

