Cultivating Virtue
with G.K. Chesterton

G.K. Chesterton was a man who upheld virtue in his life, in both thought and deed. He was a constant defender of the faith wedded to reason, particularly after he converted to Catholicism.

This Lenten season, we focus on Chesterton's insights into the Cardinal virtues of Temperance, Justice, Fortitude, and Prudence, as well as the three great Theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love. Each week, we will be focusing on one of these virtues as well as a specific symbol chosen to signify each.
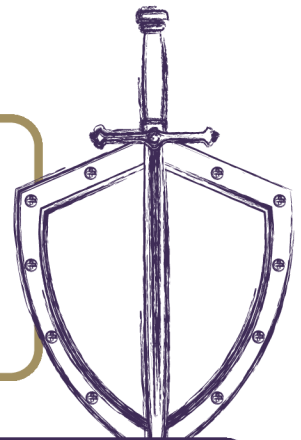
First, the symbol of the torch represents all the virtues combined. This idea springs from the great call from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

When we try to live a life of virtue and seek out others who inspire us by their virtuous actions, we become filled with the light of Christ and become glowing manifestations of the glory of God.

During the first week of Lent, we focus on the virtue of **Fortitude**, or courage. Here, we find the sword and shield an obvious and fitting choice. Chesterton would most likely agree! We are in a constant battle, says St. Paul in Ephesians, against the forces of darkness. What better symbol for courage and fortitude than the spiritual Armor of God?

Next, in week two, we reflect on **Prudence**, that virtue of reason and well-formed conscience that aids us in making the right decision for the greater good. We are inspired by the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13), and take the burning oil lamp as a symbol to remind us to be wise. To know best how and when to act, we must first be properly prepared.
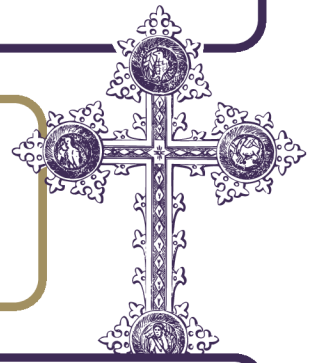
During the third week of Lent, we meditate on **Justice**, the virtue that helps us to give what is due to God and to our neighbor. A widely known symbol of justice is a blindfolded woman holding balanced scales. We chose to simply use scales, because a Chestertonian approach to the virtues is never blind.

Beginning on *Laetare* Sunday, we turn to Chesterton's thoughts on **Temperance**. In Chesterton's writings, we find him battling contemporaries who use "temperance" as a buzz-word—but he doesn't think it means what they think it means. Chesterton balks at the idea that "temperance" focuses only on total abstinence from alcohol. We sympathize with his annoyance. Being temperate means to avoid extremes in all things, and the key to it is moderation.

The fifth week of Lent begins our focus on the Cross—the most recognized symbol of the virtue of **Faith**. Simply to look at a cross and ponder Christ is to act upon the virtue of Faith: believing in God and all that He has revealed to us. We are drawing closer to the Cross during this last week before the Triduum.

We will call upon the virtue of **Hope** during Holy Week. As members of the Church Militant, the resurrection IS our hope. The resurrection of Christ firmly anchors our hope for Heaven, and the symbolism is clear. When we are at our darkest moments, hiding in the upper room, terrified of what happens next, we can remain secure in the hope that Christ will make all things new and we will one day join Him in glory.

During the Easter Octave we will reflect on **Charity**. The greatest example of God's love for us is Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, but we'll reflect more on how we can share the gift of Christ's love with others. We chose the image of the Sacred Heart because Christ's Heart burns for us. It burns for us out of Love so that we may love. Our hearts are not satisfied with counterfeit love, either. Only the love of God, the Heart of Christ, can truly satisfy us.

Far too often, the life of virtue can seem like a dreary affair, the mere avoidance of vice. But for Chesterton, as for the great Saints throughout history, virtuous living was a blazing adventure. Chesterton wrote, "Men should always love virtue before they love duty; the reverse method produces dried souls, incapable of joy." In his life and writing, Gilbert not only exemplified the virtues, but challenged others to grow in them. Light the torch, take up the armor, trim the lamp, balance the scales, open the lock, and remain steadfast in Faith, Hope, and Love.