



REEL VIRTUE

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REEL VIRTUE

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“Stories are a way for us to understand the world, and sometimes to survive it,”

Guillermo del Toro once remarked. It is a simple insight, yet profound, human beings make sense of life through stories. We learn through them, heal through them, discover ourselves through them. Whether they are whispered, written, sung, or projected in a darkened cinema, stories shape who we are and who we hope to become.

We live in a world saturated with narrative. Films, streaming series, short-form videos, animations, and fandom cultures all provide the images and language through which many now interpret their interior lives. Cinema is not simple entertainment, it is often the lens through which we understand friendship, identity, justice, sacrifice, and hope. These stories offer not only entertainment, but also vocabulary, vocabulary that helps us speak about our own experiences when our own words feel fragile, awkward, or insufficient.

This resource, Reel Virtue, recognises that reality and places it at the service of pastoral care. Our aim is simple, to help young people leaders see cinema not as something external to Catholic life, but as a tool that can open doors to Scripture, to dialogue, and to virtue. When used intentionally, film becomes a safe common ground where difficult conversations can begin, not with “what do you think?”, which can feel exposing, but with, “what did you see in this story?” Characters become mirrors, scenes become catalysts, and shared viewing becomes a pathway into deeper listening and understanding.

This resource is anchored in a recent and encouraging plea from Pope Leo XIV. In his address “Encounter with the World of Cinema” (15 November 2025) the Pope celebrates cinema not simply as entertainment but as an art that can awaken the soul, educate the imagination and set hope in motion. He continues in calling cinema a popular art in the noblest sense, an art intended for everyone, and therefore an apt place for encounter. When the “magic light of cinema illuminates the darkness,” he said, “it simultaneously ignites the eyes of the soul,” helping audiences to consider their lives with new clarity and to “rediscover a portion of the hope that is essential for humanity to live to the fullest.”

These words resonate deeply, for as the Pope reminded us, going to the cinema “is like crossing a threshold”, in that darkness “the heart opens up and the mind becomes receptive to things not yet imagined.” People come seeking entertainment, yes, but also meaning, justice, beauty, consolation and challenge. Cinema is more than simply a screen, it is “an intersection of desires, memories and questions... a sensory journey in which light pierces the darkness and words meet silence.”

This is why film can be such a fruitful tool for youth work. It allows young people to explore moral questions at one remove, through characters and situations that are not their own, yet strangely feel familiar. It gives a shared reference point from which to speak openly. And it forms a communal space, we sit side by side with friends and strangers, laugh together, gasp together, and sometimes grow quiet together as a moment on screen touches something unspoken within us.

Reel Virtue invites youth groups to lean into this communal experience. Watch a film together, a blockbuster, a classic, a favourite among your group, and then take a little time to talk. What themes emerged? What

emotions did the characters provoke? Which moments echoed stories from Scripture, or challenged you, or reminded you of real-life situations in your community? In the four sessions that follow, you will see that the films need not be Catholic or even religious. They simply need to be films your young people enjoy watching, this will create openness, and openness is where dialogue begins.

As Pope Leo XIV phrased it:

- Cinema widens the imagination and helps people examine their lives anew; it can give shape to feelings that otherwise remain unnamed.
- Cinemas and cultural spaces are “the beating hearts of our communities”; they cultivate relationships and human flourishing, not merely consumption.
- Authentic cinema does more than console, it provokes and challenges; it invites viewers to face beauty, pain and moral complexity, and thus can educate the gaze.

WHAT THIS RESOURCE IS & HOW TO USE IT

The convictions expressed by Pope Leo XIV about cinema, that it is a meeting place, a home for those seeking meaning, and a spark that can “set hope in motion”, shape the whole vision of Reel Virtue. This resource takes those convictions seriously by treating film not merely as entertainment but as a starting point for thoughtful and faith-filled conversation. We will not only show clips and watch scenes together; we will create a short, safe forum where young people can explore Scripture, reflect on virtue, speak honestly, and listen well.

At its heart, Reel Virtue follows a simple rhythm: **wonder, reflect, watch, and act.**

Each session is intentionally brief, repeatable, and flexible. In practical terms, this means gathering your group, sharing a Scripture reading, watching a two-to-five-minute scene from a chosen film, using a few guiding questions to spark reflection, tying this back to a clear catechetical point, and closing with an invitation to practise the virtue in daily life. Think of this booklet, and the accompanying videos, as a guidebook: something you can open, use, adapt, and return to again and again.

The films we recommend are guides, not replacements. They are bridges to Scripture, not substitutes for it. They serve as points of contact where the biblical imagination can meet the modern imagination. Pope Leo XIV

put this beautifully when he described cinema as “a meeting place and a home for those seeking meaning and a language of peace.” That is exactly the meeting place we hope you can cultivate with the young people you serve.

This resource includes four sections, each an example of how to replicate the method we are proposing for you to use. For our examples we have chosen to link virtues, with biblical figures and how these can be seen represented in a new manner in the seventh art form, cinema. In each part, we will have a 20-minute video, a discussion between Fr Brandon Gatt and Deborah Ebejer, as an example on how to explore different films in relation to a theme. We will include the structure adopted for each video in order for you to readthrough and replicate in your own fashion.

WHY BIBLICAL FIGURES, AND WHY FILM?

Throughout Christian history, biblical figures have helped communities understand how to face, and sometimes how to fail to face, the challenges of life. Their stories carried lessons of faith, courage, compassion, wisdom and perseverance. Artists across the centuries turned to these figures again and again, drawing on them to explore deeper meanings in their own cultural moments. In paintings, sculpture, stained glass, manuscript illumination and architecture, biblical figures and the virtues were woven into the spiritual imagination of whole societies.

Sometimes the virtues appeared side by side with biblical figures, sometimes the figures themselves became embodiments of a virtue. In either case, the intention was the same, to help communities contemplate goodness through an image that moved both the mind and the heart.

But symbols change. What once spoke clearly may fade, become obscure, or be replaced by new cultural reference points. Today, visual media, films, series, animation and digital storytelling, shape much of the imaginative world in which young people live. While these stories are often secular, they still echo the structure of virtue: sacrifice, discernment, courage, self-control, integrity, justice, hope.

This gives us an extraordinary opportunity. By returning to the biblical sources and recovering figures who are sometimes forgotten in contemporary memory, we can once again link them to their corresponding virtues. And by pairing those figures with characters from modern cinema who embody similar qualities, we can create new “personifications” of virtue that feel immediate, relatable and inspiring for today’s audiences.

EPIISODES

The video series consists of four episodes. Each episode follows a clear three-part structure:

1. REFLECT - BIBLICAL FIGURE

- A short narrative introduction to the biblical figure.
- A selected passage from Scripture that highlights the figure's defining moment in relation to the virtue.
- Purpose: to root the discussion in the biblical story first, ensuring that the virtue has a clear scriptural foundation.

2. WONDER - VIRTUE DEFINITION

- A concise definition of the virtue.
- A brief explanation of how the biblical figure embodies this virtue.
- Purpose: to connect the story with the moral concept, offering clarity and shared understanding.

3. WATCH - THE NEW ALLEGORY

- An exploration of how the virtue is reimagined in today's visual storytelling.
- Film characters who embody similar qualities are introduced and analysed.
- Incorporates short film clips, commentary and reflection prompts.
- Purpose: to bridge the biblical tradition with contemporary imagination, allowing the virtue to come alive in today's cultural language.

EPIISODE OUTLINE

Episode 1: Deborah & the Virtue of Prudence

Clarisse	<i>Fahrenheit 451</i> (2018)
Padmé Amidala	<i>Star Wars Prequels</i> (1999-2005)
Shuri	<i>Black Pather: Wakanda Forever</i> (2022)

Episode 2: Melchizedek & the Virtue of Justice

Peter Parker	<i>Spider-Man</i> (2002)
Dumbledore	<i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i> (2005)
Aslan	<i>The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</i> (2005)

Episode 3: Judith & the Virtue of Fortitude

Katniss Everdeen	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (2012)
Éowyn	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</i> (2003)
Rodrigues	<i>Silence</i> (2016)

Episode 4: John the Baptist & the virtue of Temperance

Obi-Wan Kenobi	<i>Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith</i> (2005)
Gandalf	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers</i> (2003)
Morpheus	<i>The Matrix</i> (1999)
Maximus	<i>Gladiator</i> (2000)

These pairings are not intended to impose religious interpretation onto films, but to open space for reflection, drawing out the echoes of virtue that already live within good stories. The characters chosen, are often chosen for how they behaved in a specific number of clips, this does not mean that it is believed that the character is a representation of the biblical figure or the virtue it is being paired with.



DEBORAH

& THE VIRTUE OF PRUDENCE

WONDER

The virtue of prudence, as defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 1806), is the cardinal virtue that enables practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the appropriate means to achieve it. It is not mere caution or hesitation but

"right reason in action," guiding moral decision-making with clarity and resolve, while directing the other virtues toward their proper ends.

Prudence can easily be mistaken for caution, cleverness, or indecision.

Classic Symbol: In art the virtue of prudence appeared with a mirror and a serpent. The mirror inviting honest self-knowledge, and the serpent recalling Christ's call to be ***"wise as serpents,"*** capable of discerning what lies beneath the surface.



REFLECT

JUDGES 4–5

Deborah is uniquely described as prophetess, judge, and military leader. She listens for God's word, discerns His will, and speaks truth and passes judgment, to the people under the palm, and issues strategic direction to Barak .

JUDES 5

Her song interprets events prophetically, she not only acts but interprets, which is the hallmark of wise prudence.

Prudence can be defined as right reason applied to action, the ability to perceive the true good in particular situations and choose the correct means. Deborah's decisions show discernment, timing, consultation, and courage for the common good.

WATCH

In this first episode, the purpose of the film selections is simple, to let contemporary stories illuminate aspects of Deborah's prudence, allowing us to recognise wisdom, discernment and courageous decision-making in characters we are already familiar with via film.

In the character Clarisse we see an aspect of prudence as discernment. She brings to screen the prophetic aspect of Deborah.



In Judges 4-5, we read how Deborah discerned the will of God and guided Barak to act upon it. In Fahrenheit 451, Clarisse's first question to Montag **"Have you ever thought, even for one second, why you do what you do?"** acts as a prophetic jolt. She sees what her society refuses to see, the cost of conformity, the importance of questioning. Like Deborah, she awakens others to truth.



Padmé embodies the judiciary aspect of Deborah, the right judgment nuance of prudence. She weighs consequences, advocates for diplomacy, and resists fear-driven policies.

When she utters the haunting line, **"So this is how liberty dies, with thunderous applause,"** she performs an act of moral judgment, seeing what her society refuses to admit.

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You can watch these aspects of Deborah and the virtue of prudence come together in the chosen cinematic allegories, thus seeing prudence in modern storytelling.



ACT



Which of the three modern characters: Clarisse, Padmé or Shuri, feels closest to Deborah to you? Why?



Clarisse awakens Montag with a question. What question do you think could awaken someone today to think more deeply?



Padmé mourns the erosion of liberty. Where today do we see fear influencing decision-making? What would a Deborah response look like?



Shuri chooses mercy over vengeance. When is mercy the wiser path in your school, workplace, family or community?



Have you ever witnessed someone showing prudence? What made their action wise?

INVITATION TO ACTION



Identify one area of your life this week where you need clearer discernment. Pray for Deborah's courage to see things truthfully.



Practise judgment: before a decision, pause and ask: What is truly good here? Who is affected? What does God desire?



Act strategically: choose one practical step that builds peace, justice or reconciliation in your immediate community.



Encourage others: name prudence when you see it in a friend, colleague or family member, virtue grows when we recognise it.

MELCHIZEDEK & THE VIRTUE OF JUSTICE

WONDER

Justice is one of the four cardinal virtues (CCC1807). It seeks right order in our relationships:

- with God,
- with one another,
- and with the world.



Justice is not revenge. It is not punishment for punishment's sake. It is not "getting even." Rather, justice is the firm and constant will to give each person their due, to restore harmony, fairness, and peace.

Classical Symbol: In art the virtue of justice was imagined as a blindfolded figure carrying scales and a sword. The blindfold for impartiality, the scales for the careful weighing of truth, and the sword for the authority to uphold what is right.

REFLECT

GENESIS 14:18–20

“Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine... and he blessed Abram.” Here justice is blessing, hospitality, and right relationship. Abram responds by offering a tithe, recognising God’s work through Melchizedek.

PSALM 110:4

“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”

This psalm links justice, priesthood, and kingship, a harmony fulfilled fully in Christ.

HEBREWS 5–7

The New Testament sees in Melchizedek a priesthood “without genealogy,” foreshadowing Christ’s perfect justice and self-giving. The Catechism interprets Melchizedek’s gesture of bread and wine as a prefiguration of the Eucharist, and of the justice Christ brings through self-sacrifice.

Melchizedek steps briefly onto the stage of Scripture, yet his presence is immense. He appears in a moment thick with possibility: Abram has returned victorious from battle, burdened with spoils and swollen with triumph. But instead of celebrating military might, Melchizedek changes the atmosphere entirely. He brings bread and wine, offers blessing, and redirects the story away from possession and pride back towards justice, peace, and covenant.

His very name means “**king of righteousness**”; **melek** (king) + **tsedeq** (righteousness/justice). And as king of Salem, shalom, sliem, he embodies justice and peace held together.

WATCH

The New Testament sees in Melchizedek a priesthood “without genealogy,” foreshadowing Christ’s perfect justice and self-giving. The Catechism interprets Melchizedek’s gesture of bread and wine as a prefiguration of the Eucharist, and of the justice Christ brings through self-sacrifice.

Peter’s journey is a modern parable of justice. Peter Parker shows us justice as responsibility, restraint, and service, the heart of Melchizedek’s righteousness.



“I missed the part where that’s my problem.” At first, Peter refuses responsibility. This moment shows a distorted sense of justice, avoiding the suffering of others because “it’s not my problem.”



“With great power comes great responsibility.” Uncle Ben’s teaching becomes Peter’s moral compass. Justice means using one’s gifts for the good of others, not for personal gain.



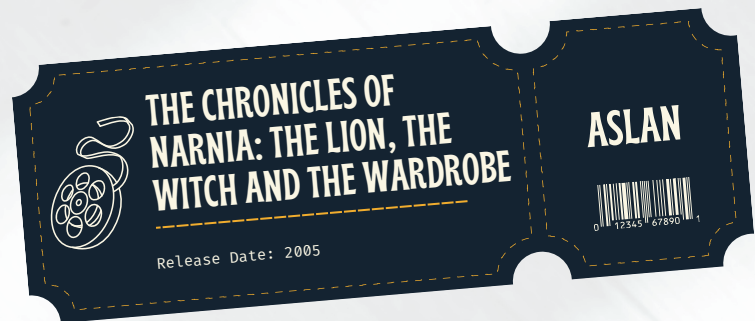
Uncle Ben’s death. Peter learns painfully that vengeance cannot heal. Melchizedek teaches the same lesson: power must be restrained, redirected, and sanctified.



Dumbledore's wisdom echoes the heart of biblical justice, ***"We must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy."***

His justice is not legalism, it is moral clarity. He sees the truth, protects the vulnerable, and guides others toward the common good. Dumbledore represents justice as; moral courage, truth-telling, mercy balanced with wisdom, leadership without domination. He stands close to Melchizedek as a leader whose authority exists to guide, not to control.

Aslan embodies the deepest form of justice, justice that restores, reconciles, and redeems.



His sacrifice on the Stone Table brings Edmund back into right relationship with his family and the world. Like Melchizedek, Aslan brings bread-and-wine justice, justice rooted in self-offering. Where human justice demands payment, Aslan offers himself. Where vengeance says "get even," Aslan says "restore him." He mirrors Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of Melchizedek's priesthood.

Melchizedek appears in three key biblical moments, each deepening our understanding of justice. Together, these texts root justice not in power, but in worship, blessing, self-giving, and peace. In the second episode of Reel Virtue, we can rediscover Melchizedek's justice through three modern cinematic allegories: Peter Parker, Dumbledore, and Aslan, each showing justice not as vengeance or domination, but as right relationship, sacrifice, and moral responsibility.

To see how these three allegories come together in practice, you can watch the second episode of Reel Virtue, where the watch, wonder, and reflect sections flow into an integrated discussion.



ACT



What does justice look like today?



How do we tell the difference between vengeance and justice?



Peter Parker learns that justice means responsibility. Where in your life do you find it hard to say, “this is my problem”?



Dumbledore speaks of choosing what is right rather than what is easy. What is one “easy” choice you want to avoid, and what might be the “right” choice instead?



Aslan restores Edmund instead of punishing him. When is mercy the true act of justice?



Melchizedek redirects a battlefield back to peace. What is one situation where you can bring calm instead of escalation?



What makes justice difficult today? What helps you act justly?

INVITATION TO ACTION



Practise responsible justice: take ownership of one problem this week, however small, that you would normally ignore.



Seek right relationship: repair one strained relationship through an act of truth, apology, or mercy.



Be a peace-bringer: intervene gently in a situation that risks conflict or misunderstanding.



Act with integrity: choose the harder, more honest path once this week, even if no one notices.

JUDITH

& THE VIRTUE OF FORTITUDE

WONDER

The Catechism teaches that fortitude “enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death” and strengthens the pursuit of justice and goodness (CCC 1808).

Fortitude is often misunderstood as fearlessness or bold impulsiveness.



Fortitude is the kind of courage that does not flare up suddenly like a spark, but grows slowly in the quiet places of the heart. It is courage rooted in prayer rather than adrenaline, the steady, deliberate clarity that lets a person see what must be done and then actually do it. It is the stubborn will to endure or to act for the sake of the good, especially when everyone else has stepped back or fallen silent.

Fortitude holds the line when others falter. It faces danger without bravado, without theatrics, and without losing its grounding in God. It is the

courage that remains when all the noisy kinds have burned themselves out, the kind that stays, the kind that carries you through.

Classical Symbol: The virtue of fortitude is usually represented as a figure standing beside a solid column, a sign of steadfast strength, the kind of courage that remains unmoved when everything else trembles.

REFLECT

JUDITH 1–13

Judith appears in one of Scripture's most dramatic moments. A city besieged, leaders paralysed by fear, and a people losing hope. Into this crisis steps a widow, unarmed, unprotected, but not unprepared.

Judith prays, fasts, discerns, and then acts with astonishing strategic clarity. She enters the enemy camp, confronts the general Holofernes, and frees her people through an act of deliberate, disciplined courage.

JUDITH 8–13

She tells the elders, “Stand at the gate... I am about to do something that will be remembered for all generations”. Through prayerful strategy and steadfast composure she gains access to Holofernes' tent.

JUDITH 8: 11–27

She calls out the men of Bethulia for their wavering and urges trust in God rather than panic.

JUDITH 16

Judith's hymn of praise, where she attributes victory entirely to God.

The Book of Judith (a Deuterocanonical text) presents one of Scripture's most compelling portraits of courageous faith. Judith teaches that fortitude is courage grounded in prayer, strategy guided by discernment, and action ordered to the liberation of others.

WATCH

The scene of Rue's burial shows fortitude at its softest and yet most unbreakable. In a place built on spectacle, where lives are reduced to numbers and deaths to entertainment, Katniss bends down and insists on seeing Rue as a person.



She restores dignity where brutality tried to erase it, laying flowers around the small body the world had already dismissed. It is a quiet act, but it is also defiant. By honouring Rue, Katniss breaks the script the Games demand of her, risking punishment simply by telling the truth: this child mattered.

And without intending to, her gesture strikes a spark in District 11, a brief glimmer of hope that grows into a fire far larger than she realises. It is courage that protects, honours, and awakens, fortitude not expressed in violence, but in reverence, resistance, and the kind of love that refuses to be taught what to fear.



Éowyn's stand before the Witch-king is Judith's story told in another tongue.

She steps into a space ruled by warriors and prophecy, a place where she is not expected, and yet she sees the moment no one else can seize. Like Judith slipping into Holofernes' camp, Éowyn recognises that the choice has finally fallen to her, and that hesitation would mean death for those she loves. Her ***"I am no man"*** is not bravado but the clarity of someone who understands that courage sometimes comes disguised as the person least likely to be chosen.

She strikes not for glory, but for the protection of her people, overturning every expectation about who gets to save a community. It is fortitude in its sharpest form: direct, decisive action, taken at the exact moment when everyone else has run out of options. Éowyn becomes, in that heartbeat, the living echo of Judith declaring, "I am about to do something that will be remembered for all generations."

Silence offers a vision of fortitude stripped of triumph and noise, courage not in the swing of a sword, but in the slow, aching endurance of faith.



In Rodrigues and the hidden Christians of Japan, we meet a form of strength that does not shout or strike, but simply refuses to disappear. Under crushing persecution, they bear witness in whispered prayers, in broken bodies, in choices no one should ever be forced to make. Their suffering is long and anguished, yet it is not empty; it echoes the deep inner courage Judith shows before she ever steps into Holofernes' tent, the nights of prayer, the wrestling of the soul, the quiet resolve formed in solitude (Judith 1-13).

Silence reveals fortitude at its most contemplative, the willingness to remain faithful when survival would be easier, to hold fast to truth when all outward signs of victory are gone. It is fortitude as steadfast witness, the courage that endures, prays, and remains.

In this third episode of Reel Virtue, we rediscover Judith's fortitude through three cinematic allegories, Katniss Everdeen, Éowyn, and Rodrigues, each revealing a different facet of this demanding virtue. Katniss shows dignity-restoring defiance, Éowyn reveals decisive, protective bravery, and Silence offers the quiet, aching endurance of witness. Together, they help us glimpse fortitude not merely as bold action, but as steadfastness of heart, the courage to honour, to protect, to endure, and to stand firm in the good.

To see how these threads weave together, you can watch the third episode of Reel Virtue, where the watch, wonder, and reflect movements unfold in a single conversation.



ACT



Which kind of courage speaks to you most, Judith's decisive act, Katniss's dignifying resistance, Éowyn's battlefield bravery, or the endurance shown in Silence?



Judith prepared through prayer before she acted. What practices help you face difficult tasks with clarity?



Katniss dignifies Rue publicly. When can small gestures of honour or compassion become acts of courage in your own life?



Éowyn steps into danger when others are paralysed. When have you needed to take initiative because no one else would?



The martyrs in Silence show a quieter fortitude. When is endurance the truest form of courage?

INVITATION TO ACTION



Face one fear this week, something small, but real, and take a step towards it.



Stand up quietly for someone who is treated unjustly or forgotten.



Persevere in one hard commitment you're tempted to abandon.



Pray for courage daily; fortitude grows in prayer.



Protect and dignify someone who is vulnerable, even in a small way.

JOHN THE BAPTIST & THE VIRTUE OF TEMPERANCE

WONDER

Temperance is perhaps the most misunderstood of the cardinal virtues. Many imagine temperance as restriction, repression, or the dull denial of joy. But Catholic tradition teaches something far richer: temperance is the virtue that orders our desires, so that pleasures, emotions, and power

serve what is truly good. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church defines temperance as that which “moderates the attraction of pleasures... and keeps desires within the limits of what is honourable.” (CCC 1809)

Classic Symbols: The classic symbol of temperance, a figure pouring liquid from one vessel into another, diluting wine with water, shows balance, proportion, and moderation.



REFLECT

MATTHEW 3:1–6 / MARK 1:2–6 / LUKE 3:1–6:

“A voice of one crying out in the desert” these passages we see John the Baptist as a desert dweller, living a radical simple life. His voice is uncluttered, free, undistracted, a man whose surroundings mirror his soul. By refusing comfort, he refuses the illusions that comfort can create.

JOHN 3:30

“He must increase; I must decrease.”

Here John the Baptist reveals the deepest pulse of temperance, the grace of stepping aside. He does not clutch at attention or authority, he lets himself become smaller so that Christ may come into full view. There is no bitterness in that diminishing, only a quiet certainty that his task is to point beyond himself.

MARK 6 / MATTHEW 14

John confronts Herod, refuses to bend the truth to comfort power, and pays the price. Even at the point of death, he remains ordered toward the good.

WATCH

Obi-Wan stands where John the Baptist stands, in a desert of his own, stripped of comfort and illusion. Temperance in him is not stiff stoicism; it is mastery of emotion. On Mustafar, where Anakin burns with anger, Obi-Wan remains painfully composed. He feels grief, love, and devastation, yet he refuses to let passion govern him.

There is sorrow in him, sorrow at watching a dear friend consumed by fury, losing himself and the promise he once carried.



Before lightsabers are drawn, Obi-Wan tries to reason with him, to pull him back from the edge, ***“Only a Sith deals in absolutes.”*** It is the voice of a temperate heart, one that still hopes. Here, temperance becomes emotional discipline, the quiet strength that refuses to let desire, rage, or fear take the wheel.



Gandalf's temperance appears in the way he guides others out of their own shadows and back into the light.

In the film, we find Théoden aged, twisted, and frayed in appearance, a king in name, but ruled by Wormtongue's poison whispered into his ear. When Gandalf sees his old friend hollowed out by corruption, he answers with a clear, unwavering truth: ***“Too long have you sat in the shadows.”***

He does not overpower him; he calls him back. And only when he reveals his true, unclouded light does Théoden finally tear free from the shackles of oppression and return to himself. The film makes visible a moral reality: corruption disfigures, and truth restores. Gandalf, like John confronting Herod, speaks with courage but without grasping for power or recognition. His strength is tempered by humility, and because of that, his authority heals rather than dominates.

“Sooner or later, you will realise, just as I did, that there is a difference between knowing the path and walking the path.”



His words feel almost like a modern echo of John's own self-forgetting line: “He must increase; I must decrease” (John 3:30). Morpheus shows temperance in the way he understands his role with clarity and humility. He knows he is not the one meant to bring about the final change, even though many already look to him as leader. Instead of clinging to that image, he steps aside. He decreases so another may rise. His task is to guide Neo, to form him, to help him become what he himself cannot be. In him, temperance takes the shape of humility, the willingness to hand on the mission rather than hoard it.



Though only a secondary reference in the episode, Maximus offers us another way of seeing temperance.

He is the man who does not wish to rule, who longs simply for home, who carries no hunger for glory. His heart is anchored in the ordinary: the quiet desire to return to his family, the steady loyalty of the soldiers who trust him without question. And when Caesar offers him power, Maximus answers with that soft but unmistakable refusal **“With all my heart, no.”** It echoes the spirit of John the Baptist: a refusal to grasp at status, a willingness to step back so that a greater good might stand forward.

In this episode, we turn to John the Baptist, who embodies the virtue of temperance in its different forms. John is the one who prepares the way not through power, but through purity of heart, not through excess, but through clarity, not through noise, but through witness.

In film, through three cinematic allegories, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Gandalf, Morpheus and Maximus, we glimpse how temperance takes shape in modern storytelling of temperance as mentorship, discipline, refusal of power, and interior self-command. Each of these characters shows a different facet of the virtue, and together they illuminate John’s path.

To see how these threads draw together, you can watch the fourth episode of Reel Virtue, where the watch, wonder, and reflect movements unfold in a single conversation.



ACT



Which character, Obi-Wan, Gandalf, or Morpheus, best helped you understand temperance? Why?



John the Baptist lived with radical simplicity. What would simplicity look like in your own life?



Gandalf confronts Théoden with courage and restraint. How can we confront wrongdoing without anger or pride?



Morpheus speaks of “walking the path”. Where is God asking you to align your actions with your beliefs?



What desire or habit currently has too much power over you? How might temperance bring freedom?

INVITATION TO ACTION



Practise one act of simplicity this week (a fast from screens, sweets, unnecessary purchases, etc.).



Regulate one emotion by pausing before reacting.



Choose humility, let someone else go first, listen more, take the quieter place.



Pray John’s prayer daily: “He must increase; I must decrease.”



Walk the path, act on one conviction you’ve been postponing.

A FINAL WORD BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This entire resource rests on a simple conviction, echoed so vividly by Pope Leo XIV: good cinema has the power ***“to safeguard and promote human dignity,”*** to challenge, to console, and even to offer a glimpse, however small, ***“of the mystery of God.”***

So gather your group.

Sit back.

Relax

Turn off your phones.

PRESS PLAY





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