

# UNDERSTANDING

There is a saying which states, “I know you think you understand what I said, but I’m not sure that what you heard is exactly what I meant.” We may hear what others say; we may develop our own ideas about how they act or live, but chances are there is much more to their stories than we will ever know. Each of us has a life story. Each of us has numerous events of joy and sorrow, opportunity and disappointment, that help shape who we are. Until we are willing to let others tell us their stories, we will never fully understand them.

One definition of understanding is the Latin, “*intus legere*,” which means “to read inwardly.” The key to understanding what we read, what we see, and especially what we hear is to be willing to move beyond mere words and images. We have heard the phrase “reading between the lines.” Understanding invites us to read within the lines, read within the story of the life of another, trying to place ourselves in their story and to see things as they do.

“We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are.”

Talmud

Another definition of understanding is to “*stand under*.” This is an invitation to switch our perception to that of another. If we place ourselves “under” someone, we not only see things from a different perspective, we also prevent ourselves from becoming their judge. This helps us admit that they know themselves better than we do. We can then see things from their eyes or feel things from their hearts, and are better able to stand beside them.

“Nothing is to be feared; it is only to be understood.”

Marie Currie

“Understanding needs suffering for growth, and suffering needs understanding to be meaningful.” Anonymous

For the month of April, we invite you to focus on understanding – to pray for the virtue for yourself, to thank God for the gift where it already appears, and to think of those persons you know who are examples of this virtue. Once you have identified these people, we encourage you to call them or write a note to them, letting them know you see the virtue of understanding in their lives. A few examples might be:

- People who withhold passing judgment on others and seek out the other’s version of a story. Those who seek to know all the facts before judging an action.
- Parents who can understand the developmental struggles of their children and choose their battles carefully.
- Someone who has gained an understanding of the bigger picture of life through suffering.
- Those who are willing to learn the language, culture or spirituality of others.
- Friends who are good listeners and can empathize with others.

## Prayer for the virtue of understanding:

Loving God, thank you for giving me the gift of your Son who has shown me the path to you. I ask for an increase in the virtue of understanding. Slow my desire to judge others and help me seek to understand their points of view. Help me truly enter into the lives of others, opening myself to their unique and precious stories. Soften my heart toward all who are of a different race, religion, culture, life style or political view than I am. Help me to stand under them and to see the world from their viewpoint that I may one day stand beside them in solidarity. Above all, open my eyes and heart to mystery. May I stand in awe at all that is beyond my understanding – your presence within our world, your unconditional love, and the mysteries of life with its suffering and miracles. Teach me your ways, O God, your ways of understanding. Amen.