

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

Life in Christ – Part 15: Temperance – Too Much of Anything is not Good

The final Cardinal Virtue we need to explore is the Virtue of Temperance. When we use the word temperance in common language, it is often related to the regulation of food and drink, particularly alcohol (for example, the Temperance Movement of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries). However, the Virtue of Temperance has a wider application.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) defines Temperance as “the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable.” [CCC 1809] God has given us many good things, but He has asked us to use them well – to be good stewards of the gifts that He has given us. [cf. GN 1:27-31 and 2:15-17]

The Virtue of Temperance helps us to regulate our basic and basest desires for things which might be considered good, when used well. For example, we know that food and drink are good and necessary for life. We also know that certain food and drink provide pleasure. The Virtue of Temperance recognizes the good that is inherent in food and regulates the pleasure that is derived from it. The Virtue of Temperance helps us to savor one piece of chocolate rather than devour the whole box. Temperance fights against the Capital Sin of Gluttony. Temperance also helps us combat the Capital Sin of Lust. Temperance recognizes the good that can come from our sexual desires (such as pleasure, bonding between persons, and procreation) but regulates our response to this desire, so that it is expressed in its fullness in the marital union. Therefore, some of the subordinate virtues that are associated with Temperance are abstinence, chastity and modesty. [cf. *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Temperance”]

The Virtue of Temperance works together with the other Cardinal Virtues to help us. As we mentioned previously, Prudence is the spring from which all the Cardinal Virtues emanate. [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, “Life in Christ – Part 12: Dear Prudence, Open Up Your Eyes”, May 19, 2019] If prudence helps us “discern our true good” [CCC, 1806], then it is the Virtue of Temperance that helps us use that good well. Justice helps us determine what is right, and Temperance helps us do what is right. Finally, we discussed in our last column how Fortitude and Temperance work together to “strengthen [our] resolve to resist temptations.”

[CCC, 1808 and cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, “Life in Christ – Part 14: Fortitude – The Good Is Always Worth The Cost”, June 2, 2019] Similarly, the *Catechism* brings the four Cardinal Virtues together through the writings of St. Augustine: “To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one's heart, with all one's soul and with all one's efforts; from this it comes about that love is kept whole and uncorrupted (through temperance). No misfortune can disturb it (and this is fortitude). It obeys only (God) (and this is justice), and is careful in discerning things, so as not to be surprised by deceit or trickery (and this is prudence).”

[St. Augustine, *De moribus eccl.* 1, 25, 46, as referenced in CCC, 1809]

Since this column arrives on Pentecost, one of the highest celebrations of the Church Year, we will continue our celebration of this Solemnity through the next few weeks by dedicating the following columns to a discussion of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

