

“Chastity is a virtue”

You, a doctor, an apostle, write to me: 'We all know by experience that we can be chaste, living vigilantly, frequenting the sacraments and stamping out the first sparks of passion before the fire can spread. And it so happens that among the chaste are found the finest men in every way. And among the lustful predominate the timid, the selfish, the treacherous and the cruel--characters of little manliness.' (The Way, 124)

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Your conduct should not be limited to simply evading falls and occasions of sin. In no way should you let it come down to a cold and calculating negation. Are you really convinced that chastity is a virtue and that, as such, it ought to grow and become perfect? Then I insist once again that it is not enough merely to be continent according to one's state in life. We must practice; we must live chastity, even to a heroic degree. This attitude involves a positive act whereby we gladly accept God's summons when he says: *Praebe, fili mi, cor tuum mihi et oculi tui vias meas custodiant* [1], 'Son, give me your heart, and turn your gaze upon my ways of peace.'

And now I ask you, how are you facing up to this battle? You know

very well that a fight which is kept up from the beginning is a fight already won. Get away from danger as soon as you are aware of the first sparks of passion, and even before. Also, speak about it at once to the person who directs your soul. Better if you talk about it beforehand, if possible, because, if you open your heart wide, you will not be defeated. One such act after another leads to the forming of a habit, an inclination, and ends up making things easy. That is why we have to struggle to make this virtue a habit, making mortification a habit so that we do not reject the Love of Loves.

Reflect on this advice of St Paul to Timothy: *te ipsum castum custodi* [2], so that we too may be ever vigilant, determined to guard this treasure that God has entrusted to us. During the course of my life, how often have I heard people exclaim: 'Oh, if only I had broken it off at the start!' They

said it full of sorrow and shame.
(Friends of God, 182)

[1] Prov 23:26

[2] 'Keep yourself chaste' (1 Tim 5:22)

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