

"He does not seek applause"

In his 17 April general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on vices and virtues, speaking about the virtue of temperance.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today I will talk about the fourth and final cardinal virtue: *temperance*. With the other three, this virtue shares a history that goes far back in

time and does not only belong to Christians. For the Greeks, the practice of the virtues had happiness as its objective. The philosopher Aristotle wrote his most important treatise on ethics, addressing it to his son Nicomachus, to instruct him in the art of living. Why does everyone seek happiness, even though so few achieve it? This is the question. To answer this question, Aristotle confronts the theme of the virtues, among which *enkráteia*, that is, temperance, takes a prominent place. The Greek term literally means “power over oneself.” So, temperance is a power over oneself. This virtue is thus the capacity for self-mastery, the art of not letting oneself be overcome by rebellious passions, of establishing order in what Manzoni calls “the jumble of the human heart.”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that “temperance is the moral

virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods.” The *Catechism* continues, “It ensures the will’s mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion, and does not follow the base desires, but restrains the appetites” (1809).

Therefore, temperance, as the Italian word says, is the virtue of the right measure. In every situation, one behaves wisely, because people who act always moved by impulse or exuberance are ultimately unreliable. People without temperance are always unreliable. In a world where many people boast about saying what they think, the temperate person instead prefers to think about what he says. Do you understand the difference? Not

saying whatever comes into my mind, like so... no: thinking about what I have to say. He does not make empty promises but makes commitments to the extent that he can fulfill them.

Also with pleasures, the temperate person acts judiciously. The free course of impulses and total license accorded to pleasures end up backfiring on us, plunging us into a state of boredom. How many people who have wanted to try everything voraciously have found themselves losing the taste for everything! It is better, then, to seek the right measure: for example, to appreciate a good wine, to taste it in small sips is better than swallowing it all in one go. We all understand this.

The temperate person knows how to weigh words and dose them well. He thinks about what he says. He does not allow a moment's anger to ruin

relationships and friendships that can then only be rebuilt with difficulty. Especially in family life, where inhibitions are lower, we all run the risk of not keeping tensions, irritations, and anger in check. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent, but both require the right measure. And this applies to many things, for instance staying with others and staying alone.

If the temperate person knows how to control his own irascibility, this does not mean we always find him with a peaceful and smiling face. Indeed, at times it is necessary to be indignant, but always in the right way. These are the words: the *just measure*, the *right way*. A word of rebuke is at times healthier than a sour, rancorous silence. The temperate person knows that nothing is more uncomfortable than correcting another person, but he also knows that it is necessary;

otherwise, one offers free reign to evil. In some cases, the temperate person succeeds in holding extremes together: he affirms absolute principles, asserts non-negotiable values, but also knows how to understand people and shows empathy for them. Shows empathy.

The gift of the temperate person is therefore balance, a quality as precious as it is rare. Indeed, everything in our world pushes to excess. Instead, temperance combines well with Gospel values such as smallness, discretion, modesty, meekness. The temperate person appreciates the respect of others but does not make it the sole criterion for every action and every word. He is sensitive, he is able to weep and is not ashamed, but he does not weep over himself. In defeat, he rises up again; in victory, he is capable of returning to his former reserved life. He does not

seek applause but knows that he needs others.

Brothers and sisters, it is not true that temperance makes one grey and joyless. On the contrary, it lets one enjoy the goods of life better: staying together at the table, the tenderness of certain friendships, confidence with wise people, wonder at the beauty of creation. Happiness with temperance is the joy that flourishes in the heart of those who recognize and value what counts most in life. Let us pray to the Lord that He might give us this gift: the gift of maturity, of age, of emotional maturity, of social maturity. The gift of temperance.