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# Temperance

Temperance consists of an inner harmony that enables the person to choose well. It is a cardinal virtue that helps us to enjoy goods freely, without allowing them to dominate or enslave us.

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Temperance enables our lives to not lose the direction that always points to God. It is about getting the facts straight, having clear the objective of our life, that is, to reach Heaven and so to be happy. If vices and greed for

money get hold of people's lives, they lose sight of the purpose for which they were born which is to love, to love God above all things and others for God's sake, to do good.

There is no hiding the difficulty in achieving the balance and inner harmony weakened by the wound of original sin. The inclination towards created goods can be very strong, but those who are carried away by these temptations are deceived. They are attracted to goals that, once obtained, do not provide the happiness they seemed to promise. In the end, they are unable to see the horizon, unable to walk, to grow, and to reach the end to which God calls them.

Temperance is that protection or support that allows us to maintain the balance that is necessary to be able to help others and to be happy. It is possible for activities, habits, or hobbies that are good in themselves

to become indispensable, so we dedicate excessive time and attention to them. In some way, they tie us down or prevent us from devoting ourselves to more important duties.

## **Restless heart**

In order for us to choose the good in every moment, we must let God act in our lives. "A man who is distant from God is also distant from himself, alienated from himself, and can only find himself by encountering God. In this way he will come back to himself, to his true self, to his true identity."<sup>[1]</sup> Seeking God through our decisions and choices is the clearest manifestation of our commitment to him, and the appropriate channel for him to act in us, and for his grace to transform us.

It is just like what Saint Augustine himself stresses with a very famous statement at the beginning of his book *Confessions*, a spiritual

autobiography which he wrote in praise of God: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (I, 1, 1). The choice of the good, the exercise of temperance, is based on God's plan that he has inscribed on our hearts.

After the rich young man's refusal to give up his possessions, Jesus told his disciples "how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:23). They were surprised; perhaps we too can be surprised by such a refusal in the face of God's call. Evil begins when greed, an excessive love of money, appears. It creeps in when one desires to always have more, in an unstoppable way, for one's own ends, for luxuries and whims. The desire *to possess many barns* perverts the heart of man. The place that God should occupy is now filled by money, by material goods that have become obstacles. It is a kind of epidemic that affects

everyone: the great and the small, men as well as women, those who already have and those who lack everything.

The love of riches is like salt water; the more one drinks, the thirstier one becomes. The inordinate desire to possess more never ends. It is never satisfied and leads to unhappiness. We try to fill an inner emptiness with material goods, and that is impossible. Our heart is made for God and only He can fill it.

### **The good use of wealth**

The abundance of goods easily makes us forget that life is a journey. The Castilian poet puts it this way: "this world was good / if we were to use it / as we should, / because, according to our faith, / it is to gain that / which we wait for." [2] Frequently remembering the purpose of our life, so as not to forget its meaning, will

help us to know how to make the right choice at every moment.

In the world of business, it is not always easy to make the right choice. In this regard, Bishop Javier Echevarría said: "Those who dedicate themselves to business must naturally seek to obtain reasonable economic gains, as a just reward for their efforts and the service they render to society. But they must avoid the temptation to seek money, power or professional success above all else. (...) Money - like power or prestige - is only an instrument; it must not become an end. Only God, the search for his glory, constitutes the end - the only End, with a capital E - worthy of man. For this reason, and it would not be good to silence him, the same Jesus who praises the noble use of riches, reproaches the attitude of a foolish man who, receiving impressive profits, thinks neither of others, nor of his soul."[3]

"The superfluity of the rich is necessary to the poor. If you hold onto superfluous items, then, you are keeping what belongs to someone else." [4] The great social and economic differences that exist are clamors for the generosity of those who have more. Only in this way can injustice disappear. To close our eyes to the misery suffered by so many families, to the hunger of thousands of children, to the deprivation suffered by people near and far, is an injustice so great that it cannot be measured.

The difficulty of entering the Kingdom of Heaven, which Jesus mentions, is only diminished and resolved through solidarity with the poor.

### **Eating and drinking reasonably**

The Lord granted Adam and Eve every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-

bearing fruit on it to serve as food for them.[5] Very simply, God pointed out the need for food for all living things, man and animal. "Jesus is not indifferent to man's hunger, to his material needs, but he places them in their proper context and gives them due priority."[6]

God commanded man to cultivate the earth to feed himself and, like all creation, it is something dear and good in itself. However, history and the present times offer images and events that seem to contradict this natural affirmation. In idolizing food, one can give in to extreme gluttony, overindulging in food and drink, without putting limits, despite damaging one's health.

Sacred Scripture speaks of the wine that gladdens the heart of man[7], and we know this to be true. However, with excessive drinking, man acts against himself, not only



because it harms his health, but also because of the effects of drunkenness: it dulls the senses, prevents relationships with others, provokes violence, debases and, if it becomes an addiction, prevents one from working and caring for others. In the end, the person cannot forgo drinking and this dependence produces a strong self-contempt.

This is the advice of St. Paul: "As in the daytime, let us behave decently: let us not eat and be drunk; let us not indulge in lust and debauchery; let us not be jealous and envy one another. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not concern yourselves with the flesh to gratify its lusts" (Rom 13:13-14).

### **Buying on whim or out of caprice**

"Be content with what enables you to live a simple and sober life."[8] This advice is for Christians of all times and for everyone, but it seems

especially helpful for our present-day consumer society. It is easy to be fascinated by a multitude of products that are advertised; markets and window shops' special offers that promote products or services that can almost become necessities for many people.

It's necessary for ourselves and to teach children to do without superfluous things, not to create needs for themselves, to enjoy what they have: it is better to share downtime with them, to be close and accessible, to play with the little ones, to listen and understand the elderly.

"Consider the lilies of the field... I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these... Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not worry anymore. All the nations of the world seek for these things, and

your Father knows that you need them" (Lk 12:27-29).

## **Learning not to be angry; empathizing**

Anger also goes against the virtue of temperance; it is an uncontrolled reaction. People who undergo fits of rage, harm and embitter those around them; sometimes their reactions arise from trivial matters. It would be enough for them to look around them more, and to be a little more reasonable, more intelligent, to empathize and to understand that such behavior is out of place and uncalled for.

Anger can also remain hidden: if it is not exteriorized, it turns into resentment. Thus, there are people who retain for a long time the memory of an injury received. Sometimes, the desire for comfort leads to reacting badly in the face of an insignificant detail. Afterwards, it

is seen that anger is useless and that it would have been better not to get angry at all.

A wise man of antiquity asks himself these questions about foolish anger: "From what do these fits of rage really come? - from a cough or a sneeze, from a fly that has not been shooed away soon enough, from finding a dog in our way, from inadvertently dropping a key from the hand of a slave? Will he bear calmly the popular cries, the sarcasms of the Forum and of the Curia, he whose ears are offended by the noise of a dragged chair? Will he bear hunger and thirst in a summer war who is irritated against the slave who has badly dissolved the snow in the wine?"[9]

It comes down to reflecting, downplaying what bothers us, letting go of what has irritated us, and trying to quickly forget it.

From Jesus Christ we also learn that there are just causes for anger: when he entered the temple and saw the fraudulent market set up there, he threw down the tables and violently expelled the money changers and sellers.[10] The same gentle God, full of goodness, attends to the children playing around him.

### **The exemplary value of temperance**

The exercise of temperance is evident in the eyes of others: close contact with people who exercise this virtue reveals that they are very free men and women, people who are not tied to riches, pleasures, comfort or fame." Seek things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God; seek the things that are above, not the things that are on earth"(Col 3:1-2). Those who have set their hearts on the true treasure enjoy the joy and peace that the

things of the earth cannot give. Therefore, they are attractive, convincing people: without boasting, without attracting attention, their actions indicate that there is more happiness in giving than in receiving, in living detached than in being eager to hoard, in overcoming the inclination to pleasure than in being slaves of the lowest tendencies.

Temperance is a very visible virtue, its manifestations are evident to others, even when they are not noticeable. Sobriety is the mirror in which one discovers a full and free life: behind it we see someone who has chosen not to live like a hen, but like an eagle<sup>[11]</sup>, close to God.

Christians, in this context, can be a living reflection of Jesus Christ, who was born and lived poor, who wore a good-quality tunic, and ate and drank with people of every condition. At times he had no roof

over his head, and some days he did not even have time to eat. He rode not on horseback but on a donkey, and so traveled the roads of Palestine on foot, from north to south. In speaking of happiness and beatitude he named the poor, the peacemakers, the pure in heart, those who mourn, the merciful... "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:12).

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[1] Benedict XVI, *Audience*, January 30, 2008.

[2] J. Manrique, *Coplas a la muerte de su padre*, 6.

[3] J. Echevarría, *Dirigir empresas con sentido cristiano*, p. 49.

[4] St. Augustine, *Commentaries on Psalm 147*.

[5] Gen 1:29.

[6] Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth I*, p. 57.

[7] Ps 104:14.

[8] St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 631.

[9] Seneca, *On Anger*, II, XXV.

[10] Cf. Jn 2:13-25.

[11] Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 7.

F. Fernández Carvajal,  
"Templanza," from "Pasó  
haciendo el bien", Palabra, 2016