

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

THE VIRTUE OF TEMPERANCE

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In the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

Today, as we approach Christmas, we want to consider the last of the cardinal virtues, which is that of temperance. We cannot but think of Jesus, wanting to be born in a stable when we think of the virtue of temperance. He who was all rich, you know, being God, being all powerful, being able to do whatever he wanted. He wanted to come into our world and become poor, so that we can become rich in participating in his divine nature. And so he, Jesus, readily chooses to come into the world in a poor family, that of Mary and Joseph, who were basically peasants, you know, and Joseph was a manual worker. There was no lavish wealth in their families, even though perhaps they may have descended from King David, at some point. When Jesus was born, he was born at a stable because, as St. Luke's says, "there was no room for them in the inn." And the key word, the key words here, in the Gospel, are the *for them*. There may have been room in many inns in Bethlehem, but there was no room *for them*, perhaps because they didn't have money to pay for their, their stay, you know, the room and board. Why? Because they were poor. And so Joseph had to scramble at the last minute and find a stable, where to, where Mary could actually have Jesus. And, and it is there that, that he is born in swaddling clothes and, and with hay and with dirt and with cold and with, you know, lack of material means and things like that. Maybe also with animals there. And, you could think of how a barn smells—it's, it's a terrible thing. But, but here it is, here it is, here is the, the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. And now he's being born, you know, from Mary. It moves us so much to see and to contemplate the scene that we so beautifully set up in our homes all the time during the Christmas season, the creche, a very important part of Christian tradition and Christian temperance is to contemplate the poverty of Jesus and the humility of Jesus to come and be born in such a way.

And, later on in life also, Jesus, as he says, you know, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head—he was poor and he physically lived a spirit of temperance, which is this virtue which allows us to regulate those things that give us pleasure here and now. You know, like food or sex or drink or, you know, listening to music, perhaps, or anything that gives, gives us pleasure, everything that, all those good things that God created. We have to use them, but not abuse them, use them temperately insofar as they lead us to our ultimate end. And that requires reason, that requires actually all these virtues as we have said, work with the virtue of prudence, we have to know how to live temperance, we have to find the measure of temperance: What should I eat right now? Should I eat two servings or one? If I'm a football player, maybe I do need to eat two or even three? But if I'm a petite person, maybe I should have half a serving, you know? So it depends, all these, all the met, the measure of temperance is determined by the prudential, by the prudence, right, of each one. And, and we have to take responsibility, each one of us has to take responsibility for what we do, because we have to think about what is in line with our end and how to use this goodness that God has created in creation for, for the purposes, that he created them, you know. So, with original sin, we know that our,

our passions and our desires and our tendencies for pleasure, are disordered. And so what we want, with original sin in the mix, is to indulge in pleasure and we don't know when to stop. And that's where reason kicks in, or should kick in, or the virtue of temperance, are that acquired virtue that we have acquired, either through our effort and through our human virtue of temperance, or also, hopefully, with baptism, with grace with the Eucharist, with confession, we, we get the infused virtue of temperance so that we, we know not only how to partake of that pleasurable thing that is in front of us, in accord with our nature, but also that we may even be able to offer it up for a supernatural motive. And that's what the supernatural virtue of temperance does for us, it gives us that extra motive that that goes beyond our nature, it's supernatural.

We know that Jesus is actually accused of not living temperance at times, because they say, this was a rumor, that unlike John the Baptist who didn't eat or drink, the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and especially, came eating and drinking with sinners, you know. Jesus eats and drinks with sinners like Zacchaeus. He's not afraid of drinking wine at the wedding at Cana, although I cannot imagine that Jesus would have taken too much of the wedding wine at Cana; he certainly did not get drunk, because that would have been a, that would have implied a loss of reason, and he cannot do that. He's not, he doesn't sin; he's sinless. Jesus dined with Simon the Pharisee and there was a lavish kind of display there of good foods and things. And yet, you know, Jesus misses those little things that Simon doesn't put out, which are the, the kiss and the, the washing of the feet, and the oil, and all that. And so you might get the impression, or someone may get the impression, well, Jesus is spoiled, he wants all these things, and, you know, and more, you know. And, and he multiplies the loaves and the fish, and he has leftovers, you know. And he has a seamless tunic and he, he wears that seamless tunic, proudly and well, you know. So it sounds like Jesus is not temperate at times. But in fact, Jesus is temperate. He uses creation in a way that is going to help him and help others grow closer to God. So, the way he uses the created world is in order to save souls. That's why he eats with sinners and drinks with them, not to indulge himself, but so that they can approach him, and they can talk to him, and he can talk to them, you know. But Jesus always possesses the right measure, and he, and he determines what that right measure is with reason elevated by his divine nature, by, obviously with him, it's, he has two natures and, and his divine nature is obviously the one that, that provides that, that union with the Father and in obedience with the Father, he can never overdo anything that he chooses to do because he has the good right in front of him all the time. But for us, it's a reason enlightened by faith. We trust and we, we, we believe in, in the doctrine of Our Lord. We believe in a person, in Our Lord, Jesus Christ. And so when we have supernatural faith, we can actually live temperance as, as a way of uniting ourselves with the sufferings of Our Lord. Our Lord is stripped from his own clothing at the Cross. He has no attachment, except the nails, that attach him to the Cross, and that's his joy, you know. And the crown of thorns is his, is his royal crown. It's something that hurts him physically, but it allows him to actually redeem us all the time. So, for Jesus the world is good, we have to know that. In fact, everything is created in the Word, everything is created in him, and unto him and for him. And so there are no bad things that exist. But all those good things that exist need to be thought about very carefully because the way we use those things in the world that are good, could lead us closer to God or could lead us away from God. And that's where we need to make that discerning choice with the virtue of prudence. As we have said before, the virtue, all virtues work with prudence, because we have to know how I can live the, the specific virtue of, in this case, temperance, or fortitude, and justice.

There is a passage that I want to read from the, the book called *Four Cardinal Virtues* by Josef Pieper. And the chapter on temperance says the following: "A study of the linguistic meaning of the Greek term, *sophrosyne*, and of the Latin *temperantia* [temperance] reveals a much wider range of significance. The original meaning of the Greek word embraces 'directing reason' in the widest sense. And the Latin stays close to this far ranging significance. In St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (12, 24f.) we read: *Deus temperavit corpus.*" God tempered the body, so to speak. And

here's the quote in English: "Thus God established a harmony in the body, giving special honor to that which needed it most. There was to be no want of unity in the body, all the different parts of it were to make each other's welfare, their common care." End quote. That's from St. Paul. Pieper continues, "the primary and essential meaning of temperance, therefore, is this, to dispose various parts into one unified and ordered whole." So this is what temperance does, it gives us unity of life—unity of, of all the aspects of our, our body, our physical body, you know, and, and it allows us to then have a mind that is spiritual so that we're not attached to the material world. And, and so that when we don't have all these, this disordered passions that go each in another direction, each in its own direction, wanting us to just indulge in, in their own specific pleasurable specificity, you know, so the stomach wants to eat food, and the tongue wants to taste food and, and, you know, all that. And, we want to drink and be merry, but we cannot do it outside of the boundaries of reason. And for a Christian, the boundaries of reason enlightened by faith, which is actually not a boundary at all, it's actually a liberating, a liberating thing. It's, it liberates us so that we can then love God and have harmony within our body.

We have to watch out for a temperance that is masked as, or I should say, an intemperance that is masked as temperance. And this is something that actually the ancient author Plato had already warned us about, through his character Socrates in the dialogue called *Phaedo*. So Socrates says to his interlocutor: "And are not the temperate exactly in the same case? They are temperate because they are intemperate, which may seem to be a contradiction, but is nevertheless the sort of thing which happens with this foolish temperance." And he explains, "for there are pleasures which they must have and are afraid of losing. And therefore, they abstain from one class of pleasures, because they are overcome by another. And whereas intemperance is defined as being under the dominion of pleasure, they overcome only because they are overcome by pleasure. And that is what I mean by saying that they are temperate through intemperance." What this means is that, let's say we have a dinner, which is going to have all sorts of exquisite appetizers and exquisite pastries, and we really want that and we want to indulge in that. And we, we would readily give into intemperance of all that because we love it so much, because it gives us so much pleasure. And our reason is clouded by the, by the exquisiteness of this food, that when it comes to lunch, right, that day, we say: "You know what? I'm not going to have lunch because the lunch I have available to me is fast food. And if I eat now, then I won't be hungry later to enjoy all those exquisite foods." So the reason why I'm temperate at lunch is so that I could be intemperate later at dinner. And that's what Socrates means that we have to watch out and examine: Why are we being temperate? Why are we abstaining from whatever gives us pleasure at that moment? Because we want to look good later, you know. Maybe there's an intemperance of vanity and that's, you know, our physical appearance; and that's why we are temperate with food. Or, or there's an, there's a temperance of, you know, like I said, in one meal in order to be intemperate in another meal, or in one aspect of our life in order to be intemperate in another aspect of our life. Well, what this requires is a deep and thorough examination of conscience, so that we know why we are doing things, right. And this is, this is how prudence helps us.

St. Josemaria said that for many people it is easier to abstain from something totally than to use it in moderation, although in order to be able to use it in moderation, one may need the capacity to abstain from it completely. So this is an interesting concept that some people who don't want to fall into intemperance, they want to abstain from everything completely, and they don't even want to touch wine or something like that. "No, no, no, I don't touch wine." Okay, that's fine. But a harder thing to do is actually drink wine, with temperance, you know, in the right measure, not getting drunk, and, and enjoying one's company, and so on, you know, with the right order and the right amount, the right people and the right context of friendship. Perhaps not drinking alone or, you know... But there, it's very hard for people to do that, to drink just the right amount and not indulge, overindulge. Because it's easier to abstain from it altogether. He says, but in order to do in the training of yourself, as you go through this, you

may need to be to have the capacity to abstain from it completely for a certain amount of time as we grow in the virtue. Because the virtue requires practice and it requires, you know, exercising our ability to abstain from it every now and then. And that's why fasting from something is good during a certain amount or a period of time, then it could be your particular exam for a while, or it could, it could be something we try to do during Advent or Lent, to abstain from something. But temperance is not only about food, it could also be about other dimensions of our life. For instance, the tongue, you know, how many times we need to mortify our tongue and not say things, because we, we would hurt someone, or a bad word would slip out, or because we would say something foolish or, you know, irreverent or simply not in keeping with our state in life and it's just mindless. And we just feel the need to talk and talk and talk, and we can't stop talking, and we can't listen to people. Well, for some people, the tongue is a very difficult member of the body to control and that's why we have in the New Testament that, that little passage from the letter of St. James that says, you know, if you control the tongue, you control the whole body, you can control the whole thing. And, and that is true, if we, if we have, if we want to grow in temperance of food or drink or other pleasurable things, like music or whatever it is that we give in to, are overindulgent, well, we can work on our tongue. Because all these issues are related, all these issues are related. And by the tongue, I don't just mean speaking with your tongue, but also, as they say, making speech acts, in other words, texting and emailing, and writing to people, and snapchatting, and all sorts of ways that we communicate with people. There's also, here I have an article from the The Wall Street Journal that talks about a, a new scientific concept in psychiatry, or in psychology, which is called *nomophobia*, *nomophobia*. So I will, I will read an excerpt from this article: "Larry Rosen knows that he has a problem. Headed home from work, the psychology professor said his heart skipped a beat when he glanced at his iPhone and suddenly realized his battery was at 7%. He had no charger. 'You get this feeling: Oh my God, I'm lost.' he said." Now this is a professor of psychology and he knows what exactly is going on and, and he is suffering from what they call smartphone anxiety. And the article continues: "Does your heart rate jump when your iPhone battery dips below 20%? You could be suffering from what some experts term 'low-battery anxiety'. Do your palms sweat when you have no access to cell service? You could have an acute case of 'nomophobia.' Short for no-mobile-phobia, the term describes the fear people can feel when they are out of mobile contact entirely. Around 15 papers have been published on nomophobia alone since 2014, and dozens more have been published on smartphone-related anxieties since 2016, according to records kept by the U.S. National Library of Medicine." So here we are before a big problem in society, you know, where people think that *my life is empty without my smartphone*, and they get into all sorts of disorders, anxiety disorders, and things like that. And clearly, you know, I think we need to really think hard about this because a life that is ruined by having no cell service, no Wi-Fi or no, you know, battery or whatever, really says a lot about our lives. And, I think we have to think really hard about what Our Lord is doing at Christmas because when he comes into our world "his way", as Pope Benedict XVI said once, "his way of being God, puts into crisis my way of being human." Somehow, if God did what he did in order to save us, that, that should just put us in a big crisis. Because "his word," as Pope Benedict says, "is a word that is disruptive of our comfort." And it should really wake us up to what is happening to us, when we give in to complaints, you know, over-exaggerated complaints about our first world problems. And, ultimately, it's really just a lack of temperance. And so, let us, let us really, you know, think: How can I live this virtue better? This Christmas, you know, am I going to go buy all sorts of things? Maybe I have already bought all sorts of things on Amazon and, and I have, you know, an intemperate use of my credit card, especially around this time, because of all those sales that are just so tempting. What am I looking for? What am I looking for? I need to ask myself that question. Am I looking for safety and security in material things? Maybe, maybe, maybe I have to let go of those things because those things pass away. They're not the purpose of my life. They're not the purpose of my life. And they're not, that's not to say that they're not good, all things are good that are created by, by God and developed by man, but they can be misused. And, if I misuse things, then they won't lead me to my ultimate end. And that's why I need the virtue of temperance, because that virtue by which I, I have a relationship

with the material world or with services that are provided by my world, so that I can discern and say, this leads me to happiness—this leads me to God and this one doesn't. Or the measure of which, you know, I choose to engage in the service or this food or this whatever is leading me to God because it's the right measure, according to reason; but this other one, that's too much, I have to abstain from that, I cannot go there. It's, it's interesting because Chesterton says whenever someone enters into a bordello and knocks on the door, he is looking for God, he says; it's true. Why do we give into intemperance? What are we looking for? We're looking for, for, for communion, when we give in to, you know, pleasure. When we eat, overeat, we're looking for sustenance, we're looking for life. And it's all true, but in a disordered way. And what we need to do is realize that I need to struggle; I need, ultimately, an idea of, of what it means to be human that is enlightened by God himself, by Christ Himself, when He becomes Incarnate. This is what the Second Vatican tells us, right? Only in the Mystery of the Word Incarnate does the mystery of man take on light. And only when I look at Jesus, can my life actually be, be calibrated that way and the use of the world be, be virtuous and temperate.

So let us think about these things and pray about them in, in, in light of our conscience and in light of what Our Lord wants of us—that way we will be able to give a Christian example of sobriety, of temperance, of detachment, of poverty in this Christmas season. And, we will show the world, hopefully, that there is more than meets the eye, that this world is not the end all and be all of all existence and it could lead us to God—it's not bad—it could lead us to God. But it has to be done in accord with reason enlightened by faith. This is what Our Lady and St. Joseph did, and we entrust all our resolutions to them.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations which you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help to put them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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