

V1_Sexagesima= The Nature and Characteristics of Gluttony
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U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love You, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

The Nature and Characteristics of Gluttony

“In hunger and thirst, in fastings often.” 2 Cor. 11: 27

If fasting and hunger are so general amongst holy Christians, who thereby subdue the flesh and keep it in servitude, as we see from today’s Epistle to have been the case with St. Paul, who says of himself that he performed his apostolic office in hunger and thirst, in fastings often; if fasting and frequent mortification of the desire of eating and drinking is a salutary, nay, necessary means for most men to tame the insolence of the flesh, and to overcome many temptations, if fasting and abstinence from flesh meat is commanded by the Church for the same purpose at different times of the year, and under pain of grievous sin, what will those Christians have to answer for who are given to gluttony? A vice that is common enough, especially amongst idle people, who spend their time uselessly; for this vice is one of the consequences of idleness. By idleness we are inflamed with lust, puffed up with pride, inclined to vanity in dress, made slothful in rising in the morning, and strongly tempted to gluttony. I will speak of this vice by answering these questions:

I. In what does the vice of gluttony consist?

II. How can one know that he is addicted to this vice?

I. The vice of gluttony does not consist merely in eating and drinking, for we must eat and drink in order to preserve life, since the natural heat of the human body always causes some consumption of vital energy, and the loss must be supplied by food taken at proper times. To that end food and drink have been given to us by the Almighty God in the greatest abundance and variety.

Gluttony does not consist in the quality, excellence, or costliness of the food or drink, provided it is not of a forbidden kind otherwise; for a poor laborer who has nothing but a plate of vegetables and a piece of bread can commit gluttony; while, on the other hand, a rich man, who has the most costly and the best prepared viands on his table, may not exceed the bounds of temperance.

Gluttony does not always consist in eating and drinking a great deal. For one man requires more than another to keep up his strength; so that of two men who are sitting at the same table, one who eats and drinks a great deal may observe the virtue of moderation, while he who eats less may sin by gluttony.

The sin of gluttony consists, then, in nothing else but an inordinate manner of eating and drinking—when the, action, namely, is not directed to the end for which God created food and drink. From this it follows that I must not eat or drink oftener or more than I believe to be necessary for that end, that is, to the support of the health and strength necessary to serve God according to my condition; just as medicine, which is used only to recover lost health, or to avert sickness, is never employed but when it is believed necessary for that purpose. Therefore, whenever my intention in eating and drinking cannot be reconciled with that end, or whenever I eat or drink in such a manner as to prevent me from directing my action to that end, I am guilty of gluttony. Thus, I cannot have a good intention when I eat or drink what is forbidden by the law of God or of the Church. That was the sin that our forefather Adam committed in Paradise, when he ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, that was given him by Eve; and that sin is the origin and cause of all the evils that the human race has to suffer. Nor could I have a good intention if I eat or drink what I know by experience, or by the advice of a physician, to be prejudicial to my health; nor when I eat or drink so much that I overload the stomach or dull the intellect so that I cannot attend to the duties of my state; and so on. Every fault and every sin that is committed in any of these ways comes from an evil source—that is, from the gratification of the sensual appetites. For he who seeks that alone does not care whether the food or drink is wholesome or not, whether it is allowed or forbidden, or whether it is enjoyed with moderation or to excess; as long as it is pleasing to the palate he is satisfied. Therefore, gluttony is an inordinate appetite, or desire of food or drink, for the sake of gratifying the sense of taste.

St. Augustine publicly acknowledges his shortcomings in this respect when he thus complains to God: “Thou hast taught me, oh Lord, to take food as I would medicine. But how often am I not deceived herein by my own sensuality, so that I exceed the requirements of necessity! Besides the intention of supporting my strength, which alone should animate me in eating and drinking, another that of gratifying my sensuality also manages to introduce itself; so that, although I am determined to eat no more than is

absolutely necessary, yet sensuality comes in uninvited and claims its share also. Further, when I believe that I have barely satisfied the wants of nature, I find on examination that the sensual appetite has committed a theft on me; so that sometimes I do not know what intention I have, nor why I eat and drink, whether it is for my health's sake, or solely for pleasure, or for both together."

The same saint writes of his holy mother, Monica, who was brought up as a child in the greatest austerity, so that, no matter how thirsty she was, she would not take a drop of water out of the usual times; and yet, when occasion offered, she allowed herself to be conquered by a fondness for wine. Whenever her parents sent her for wine she used at first to taste just a few drops, but as time went on she grew so accustomed to it that she could drink it by the glassful. However, her parents found her out, and having given her a sharp reproof, cured her of the bad habit.

From thus I must conclude that if such great Saints were not freed from this vice, although they constantly endeavored to mortify and overcome themselves, and always took the greatest pains to eat and drink with a good intention, and not to exceed the bounds of Christian mortification, so that they took food as if it were medicine, what must we think of worldly-minded people who deliberately seek their bodily comfort, convenience, and pleasure in all things, who are shocked at the very name of Christian mortification and penance, who look upon a fast of forty days, commanded under pain of mortal sin by the Church of God, as an intolerable burden and think it next to an impossibility to keep it to the end? Do not these people sin by gluttony every day almost? "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matt. 7: 16), said Christ of the false prophets. Even so, it may easily be seen whether one is addicted to the vice of gluttony and whether he seeks his pleasure in eating and drinking, or to speak more correctly, ways and means of gratifying one's sense of taste.

II. Signs of gluttony are: To eat or drink too early; to be too delicate in eating or drinking; to eat or drink too much; to eat or drink too eagerly; to be too careful about good eating and drinking. These signs show that one does not take food or drink for the proper end, but rather to satisfy the sense of taste, and that, therefore, one is guilty of gluttony.

1. To eat and drink before necessity obliges. Thus Jonathan was sentenced to death by his father because he tasted a little honey before the proper time. This sign is to be seen in those who have no proper time fixed for their meals, and who regard their appetite and their desire as their clock, and not hunger or necessity. They are always ready to eat, as often as they find anything that suits their taste. Early or late, morning, noon, or evening, between meals, it is all one to them. There are some who, before they have finished dressing in the morning, nay, immediately on awaking, and while still in bed, must have tea, coffee, a pipe of tobacco, or something else ready for them; they eat and drink before they say their morning prayers, nay, before they make the sign of the Cross, or a good intention, or even think of God. An evident sign amongst those who are in good health and have no valid excuse for anticipating the usual time is that they eat and drink not through

necessity and for the sake of preserving their strength for the service of God, but merely to satisfy their sense of taste, and that therefore they are guilty of gluttony.

2. To be too delicate in eating is the second sign of gluttony, and it is to be observed in those who, although they do not eat out of meal-times, yet insist on having everything cooked in a particular manner, so as to suit their taste, and if that is not done they have no words harsh enough for the cook; they are never satisfied with common food, no matter how good it is; they must always have the best of everything, no matter what it costs. In this class, however, I do not mean to include the sick, or the delicate, or those of high station who place exquisite viands before their guests, according to the requirements of necessity, Christian charity and courtesy. But, generally speaking, the satisfying one's self with food of that kind can hardly be called anything but gluttony and sensuality.

3. This ordinarily gives rise to the third sign, eating too much. He who measures the quantity of his food by his appetite and taste cannot but exceed the bounds of moderation, and will eat more than necessity requires. There are some to whom one might with truth apply those words of the prophet Isaias: "Most imprudent dogs, they never had enough" (Is. 56: 11). They eat and drink as if they could never satisfy themselves; as long as they like the food, and have plenty of it, they continue to gorge themselves, until the overloaded stomach refuses to bear any more. These people are worse than oxen, horses and mules that never eat more than is necessary to satisfy their hunger. This is therefore, the most odious and most injurious form of gluttony.

4. The fourth sign of gluttony is a too great eagerness in eating; the sin that Esau committed when he so far forgot himself as to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage. Esau lost the glory of his birthright because he gave way to his desire for that vile food, for the sake of which he sold his dignity as first-born; thus showing what an influence gluttony had on him. It is not the costliness of the food, but the too great desire for it which constitutes gluttony. The most remarkable sins of gluttony were caused, not by delicately prepared meats, but by coarse and common food: The first man was tempted not by the well-cooked meats, but by a raw apple; Esau, by a dish of lentils, not by a roast fowl; the devil tempted our Lord by a piece of dry bread, and not by a well-prepared dish. So true is it that it is not the quality of the food, but a too great eagerness for it that constitutes gluttony. They sin who, while they are eating, are so completely absorbed in what they are doing that their eyes, hands and their whole bodies, as well as their mouths, are fully occupied; they swallow down one mouthful after another, as if they were afraid the table would fly away from them unless they make haste. An evident sign of gluttony, and, indeed, of rudeness, which is not only contrary to Christian temperance, but is also very injurious to health. People should remember this warning: "Use as a frugal man the things that are set before thee; lest, if thou eatest much, thou be hated" (Eccles. 31: 19); that is to say, eat with prudence, modesty and decency.

5. The fifth sign is to be too careful about good eating and drinking, as is the case with those who are always feasting, as if they did not eat to live, but live to eat and drink. Of such people St. Paul says: "Whose God is their belly" (Phil. 3: 19); they are nearly always thinking of eating, drinking and feasting. It was for living in that way that the rich man in

the Gospel was condemned to hell; for the Gospel does not say that he was guilty of any other sin but gluttony: “There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day” (Luke 16: 19). What will be still harder to answer for at the judgment-seat is that those who live in that way have hardly anything left wherewith to give alms, although the poor are suffering hunger and thirst. There was a certain French courtier who had built for himself a magnificent house like a palace; when the king saw it he could not sufficiently admire the skill of the architect, the beauty of the furniture, etc. But when he went into the kitchen, and saw that it was very small and that it had only one fireplace, he was amazed, and asked how such a mistake was made, to put a small kitchen like that in so large and fine a house. Your majesty, answered the courtier, it was no mistake; for it was done at my special order; “a small kitchen makes a large house, but a large kitchen makes a small house.” It is not hard to understand what he meant by that.

6. Finally, one may be addicted to the vice of gluttony, although one does not eat out of meal-times, nor too delicately, nor too much, nor too greedily, nor too luxuriously. And how is that? A beggar may be avaricious, although he does not own a farthing; a poor girl may be proud, although no one has any regard for her; namely, in heart, and through an inordinate desire of riches and honors. In the same way one may be guilty of gluttony, and many, in fact, are guilty of it who have hardly enough to support life, and yet long for good living and envy those who can sit every day at a well-furnished table, while they think themselves unhappy in being deprived of that pleasure.

Like the Israelites in the desert, who longed for the flesh-pots of Egypt, and who were tired of the manna that was sent them daily from heaven: “Our soul now loatheth this very light food” (Numb. 21: 5), so these people long for the means of indulging in the pleasures of the table. And how severely the Israelites were punished for their sin! “Wherefore the Lord sent amongst the people fiery serpents” to bite and kill them, and to teach them, and us also, how hateful to God is the vice of gluttony.

Whenever we enjoy the gifts of God in the shape of food and drink, we must not forget the good intention, or lose sight of the end for which we should eat and drink, which is to preserve our strength for the service of God; and if we do that we shall at once overcome all gluttony. There are opportunities of mortifying ourselves in that respect, even at a well furnished table; for instance, we might allow one or two morsels of something we are very fond of to remain untasted and offer them up to God in thought; or we might now and then abstain altogether from the dish we like best, or, what is still better, keep it for Jesus Christ—that is, for the poor—as we read of St. Louis, king of France, whose biographer says of him that he always kept the best food for the poor, while he himself was contented with the worst; or we might leave the table before having fully satisfied our appetite. Mortifications of this kind, when practiced with perseverance, and daily, are of more profit than fasting occasionally for whole days together. Let us often recall those words of the Apostle to the Romans: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in this serveth Christ, pleaseth God” (Rom. 14: 17, 18). Therefore, according to the example of the same Apostle, who says elsewhere,

“I know both how to abound and to suffer need” (Phil. 4: 12), let us try to practice temperance, that we, too, may be able to say of ourselves with truth, I know how to eat and be hungry; I know how to act when I have abundance and when I am in want. They who have to be content with coarse and homely food, must be resigned to the will of God and thank him for what he has given them. They who have abundance must learn how to keep themselves within the bounds of Christian temperance. And with regard to this matter, let us all remember the words of Christ: “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away;” and so we shall learn to reserve our greatest appetite for the heavenly banquet which will satiate us for all eternity. Amen.

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