

The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendon's

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A Disciplined Faith: Temperance

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

"But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."

1 Corinthians 9:27 (ESV)

We finally made it to *temperance*—the last of the 'outward' disciplines in our fellowship's *Rule of Life*. And while it sounds like an obvious Christian character trait we

should all possess, it's much harder to find a receptive audience when teaching or preaching on this topic. That's because we love to embrace our liberty in Christ, free of overbearing rules and expectations (Galatians 5:1). At the same time, we're reluctant to remember that this gift of liberty shouldn't be used to satiate our desires (Galatians 5:13). Somewhere in the middle is a spiritual "scrimmage line" faced by most thoughtful believers—that 'sweet spot' between excessive freedom touted in many corners of Christianity and the overbearing control exercised in others. Nor is this place of tension something that only exists within congregations or denominations; it can be much closer to home. For a lot of us it's a daily contest that tugs deep within our own choices and decisions. The answer, as you can imagine, is found in the discipline of temperance.

Temperance. Sounds rather prohibition-esque; something that would make members of the Temperance Movement very hap-

py back in the early 1800's or something that would excite prohibition enforcement officers in the 1920's. In both of these historic settings, however, the desired goal was usually abstinence, not temperance; and for those who are not certain of the difference, abstinence usually seems to win the day. This results in a Christian orthodoxy (right doctrine) and Christian orthopraxy (right actions or behavior) of rigid, ascetic faith centered on denial—and those who do it best often look down on those who can't. To be sure, there are things we must deny ourselves because they are absolutely poison to a child of God (e.g., idol worship, sexual perversion, etc.), but the rest of 'life' falls into this category of tempered, responsible use and behavior.



Okay, so what is temperance? Technically, *temperance* (the noun) and *temperate* (the adjective) mean moderation in action, thought, or feeling; restraint; keeping within limits; not extreme or excessive; marked by an avoidance of extravagance; and self-control in the indulgence of the appetites or passion. These two words find their origins in the root word *temper*. Its earliest definition was to exercise control over, to mollify; to harden or toughen; and to make stronger and more resilient.

When something is tempered, usually by heat, it has undergone a strengthening process to ensure its shape, durability, and purpose. Think of a knight's sword or a chef's best kitchen knife; they've been tempered to withstand hard service. Temperance for the Christian is the mode of life and faith that results from self-control toward those things that can cause weakness, sin,

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and downfall. This is particularly true with those things, even benign things, that can lead to abusive excess such as food or alcohol. It's a knowing when to say *yes* and when to say *no*. The New Testament writers used the Greek word *egkrateia* for temperance about 10 times and it literally means continence—yes, continence; the same word that deals with bladder control (especially at night). Add the prefix 'in' to it and it means that you struggle with control. But remove the prefix and it means being strong in a thing; discipline; or mastery.

That's why temperance is not the same as abstinence. Temperance is the discipline that helps us achieve moderation. For example, a glass or two of wine at a dinner party may be just fine but drunkenness is a sin; a plate or two of food at the Chinese buffet is a wonderful meal but five platefuls of nothing but crab rangoons and spring rolls—several times a week!—is absolute gluttony; to have a smart phone for communication and information is a useful and sometimes needful tool but to be surgically grafted to one 24 hours a day is a pathological obsession. Moderation is God's gift (He made everything good in its proper use and limits); excessive indulgence or extreme denial is not.

Scripture carefully builds our understanding of temperance through this use of *egkrateia* and several of its related Greek synonyms. For example, 1 Corinthians 9:25-27 speaks of mastery over bodily weaknesses and desires. 1 Corinthians 11:21,34 deals with gluttony and drunkenness (and for a real interesting Old Testament slant, take a look at Proverbs 23:2 when it comes to one's appetite!). 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 describe a self-controlled mind in areas of opinion or passion. 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to being sober or circumspect in our thoughts. 1 Timothy 2:9-10 and 1 Peter 3:3 deal with the exercise of moderation in our dress and appearance (these verses are for the ladies; men your caution can be found in Job

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27:16!). And Philippians 4:5 calls us to be appropriate in our relationships with each other.

Taken together, we see that temperance compels us to measure our appetites, thoughts, emotions, appearance, and interactions by God's standards, calling upon the Holy Spirit to grant us the mind of Christ in all these things. Temperance is nothing short of the believer's appropriate use of created things, the right

employment of our thoughts and desires, and the right practice of social behaviors. It is, in many ways, the most visible of the outward disciplines because it immediately sets us in contrast with a self-indulgent, super-sized culture. It is a living witness to everyone around us that our 'standards for life' are from above, not from below. What is temperance? Not too much, not too little, but just right as befits the sons and daughters of righteousness.



In the next edition of *The Navigator*, we will move into the “corporate” disciplines; those things that help to strengthen our faith when practiced in the company of other believers. The first in this category will be the discipline of confession.

Rejoice!
Fr. Alan Andraeas

MONASTIC MUSE

muse \ 'myüz \ **1:** *vb* to turn something over in the mind meditatively,
2: to think reflectively, **3:** *n* a state of deep thought...

Temptations, when we first meet them, are as the lion that reared upon Samson; but if we overcome them, the next time we see them we shall find a nest of honey within them.

—John Bunyan (1628-1688), English Baptist preacher and author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*

Life In the Temperance Zone

Sue Andraeas

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Philippians 1:27

When I told a friend that I was beginning this article on temperance, she shared with me a memory she had of a group of individuals within her Nigerian church: The Temperance Society. They were tight-lipped, sour-looking, stern people who tried (unsuccessfully) to get others to join their group. And what was their group promoting? Not temperance but abstinence—of alcohol. Our own country has also had its various temperance movements; one around the time of the American Revolution that took place in just a few colonies, and then the ‘big one’ in the early 1800’s.

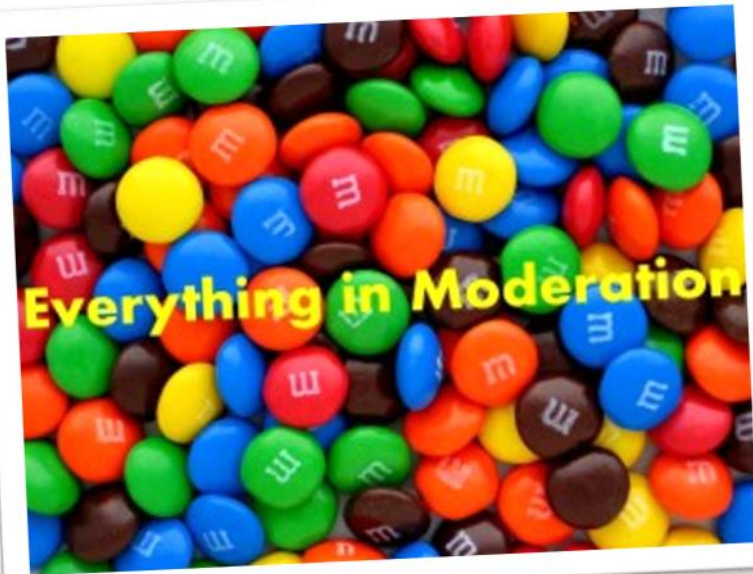
There were good reasons for these attempts to outlaw alcohol. In the cities, people were showing up drunk for work and causing accidents and errors in manufacturing. And in the rural areas, people were using grain to distill spirits and then feeding the fermented grains to cattle, making them sick and their milk unsuitable for human consumption. (Did you know that this was the original reason for pasteurizing milk? Drunk farmers didn’t keep their barns clean and ‘drunk,’ dirty cows had a higher rate of mastitis that contaminated the milk!) Somewhere along the line, teetotalers—people who wanted to ban the consumption of alcoholic beverages entirely—chose the wrong word. They should have called their venture “The Abstinence Movement.” Abstinence is the total refraining from doing or consuming something. Temperance, on the other hand, is doing or consuming in moderation. They got it wrong. St. Benedict got it right.

Every monastic order seems to focus on one particular element of a disciplined life more than others. Don’t misunderstand me! A monastic life is a holistic life of obedience, study, worship, prayer, work, and rest no matter the Order or community in which it is lived out. But where some excel at education, others are better at aiding the poor, or asceticism (self-denial), or a sequestered life of prayer. St. Benedict’s Rule (his plan for how to live in a Christian Community while keeping Christ central), if I had to sum it up in one word, is one of Temperance. Moderation. Not going overboard in any one area but keeping a balance between all those categories I named above.

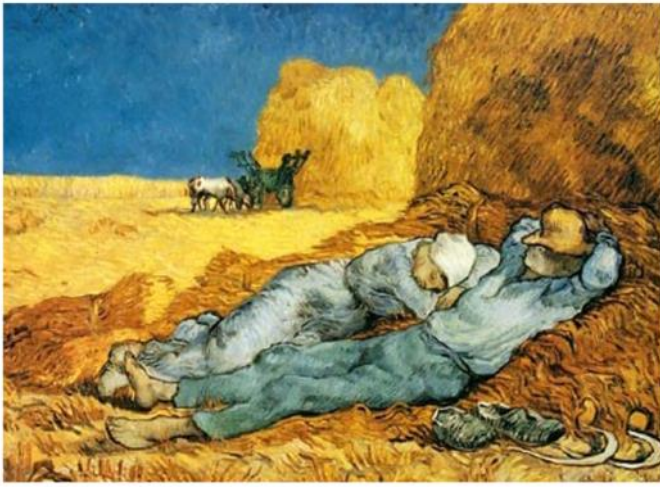
He recognized that too much of even a good thing was inherently a bad thing, even too much work, too much denial, too much fasting, or too much asceticism. Why? I think the main reason for his decision to develop a plan that even moderated the spiritual disciplines is because those who could not fast, for instance, could easily become discouraged by those who could go without food for a long time. And those who found fasting easy could become prideful for their great ‘sacrifice’—which wasn’t nearly as sacrificial as the person who fasted a little but with great difficulty. You can see how every discipline, when successfully pushed to the extreme, can become a stumbling block rather than a pathway to Christ. Let me give you another illustration directly from St. Benedict himself.

In his Rule, St. Benedict lays out very down-to-earth, practical guidelines for communal life. Chapter 48, *Daily Manual Labor*, is divided into 7 subchapters that give practical advice for ordering the discipline of labor. (This is the chapter I read the most because it is the one I find hardest to balance in my own life!) Sub-chapter 48:1 begins with these words: “Idleness is the enemy of the soul.” By ‘idle,’ he didn’t mean ‘not doing anything’

but ‘not doing anything productive and/or meaningful.’ If he were living in our culture today, he might warn against idle activities like...computer games, extended time on Facebook or email forwards, mindless web surfing, television, endless texting, constant infatuation with every breaking news brief and what everybody thinks about it—in other words, times of unproductive busy-ness.



St. Benedict goes on to divide work into two distinct categories: labor (physical work that produces something tangible) and *lectio divina* (spiritual work of carefully, prayerfully reading Scripture or other religious works in a way that produces intangible spiritual results). Subchapter 48:2 provides a pragmatic schedule for incorporating these two kinds of labor into daily life between Easter (spring) and October (fall). He builds into the schedule a two-hour break, between 1-3 PM, when the work of *lectio* could occur. At first glance, that may seem odd. For people who work 9-5, this is prime work time! But these Benedictine monks were not working a 9-5 job. They were farming in a region of Italy where summers were oppressively hot. This built-in siesta saved them from undue expenditure of energy in the heat of the afternoon—which actually increased productivity. They could return to the fields and other jobs re-



quiring manual labor when the afternoon winds began sweeping down from the mountains and the sun began to set. During their ‘time off,’ they were to rest silently in their beds, either napping or reading. (This is my plan for 2017; mandatory sestas!) Later in this chapter, Benedict explains his rationale: “... there must *always be moderation* in whatever such demands are made...” (emphasis mine).

Subchapter 48:3 switches things around during the winter, making *lectio* the first work of the day, as they wait for things outside to warm up a bit. (Being located at the bottom of a mountain, on the western side, I’m sure it took a while for the sun to reach them!) He also allows for more time for prayerful study during Lent, for obvious reasons. In another subchapter, he recommends assigning a few senior community members to monitor *lectio* time to make sure the reading material is appropriate and that nobody is just goofing off (sort of like a teacher would monitor study hall). All labor ceases on Sunday except for the ‘feckless and lazy’ who can’t study all day without getting squirmy (that would be me...), and those who are too sick for manual labor are given a craft that is meaningful but not over-burdensome. Balance. Temperance.

Moderation in all things is a rather Scriptural discipline, but it’s difficult to find a specific reference that proves it. Rather, you need to look at the whole of Scripture. Jesus was found in crowds feeding the hungry, healing the sick—and heading off to secluded places for solitary rest and prayer. There were times when he feasted—and times when he fasted. Times of verbal instruction were balanced with hands-on mission work and journeys—or ‘object lessons’ where he’d prove his point by walking across the Sea of Galilee. In some places, Scripture encourages the drinking of wine. In other places, it warns churches against drunkenness. We are told all food is lawful—but not gluttony. Enjoying a celebration is fine—but debauchery (sensual partying) certainly is not. Christians are not denied

the true God-given pleasures of this world but are taught to enjoy them in moderation. In that way, we can avoid becoming entrapped by—or addicted to—the very things that are to bring us happiness.

Just one final word of warning. Please do not confuse ‘moderate’ with ‘lukewarm.’ In the Book of Revelation, Jesus confronts the Church of Laodicea because their actions are neither hot nor cold but are sort of half-heartedly committed to a life of devotion to their Savior. They are ‘playing’ church rather than ‘being’ The Church. On top of that, they are rather proud of their accomplishment in providing for themselves *physically*. They don’t realize that, while neglecting their devotional needs, their immoderate commitment to their earthly needs has left them quite impoverished *spiritually*. (Check it out for yourself in Revelation 3:14-22.) Jesus tells them that He’d rather they were all in—or all out!

We need to lead a balanced Christian life and not try to do a balancing act of living both a Christian life and a worldly life. It is our spiritual disciplines that need to be moderate. We are to be temperate and balanced in our meditation, prayer, fasting, study; in our life of simplicity, solitude, submission, service, and purity. Temperance is the ‘binding’ that holds all these other



personal disciplines together. It is only in that cohesiveness of our personal Christian living that we can then join together with fellow believers in corporate Christian life. We are called to Christ as an individual; we are to be committed to Christ as an individual. Then, and only then, can we live out our Christian life in community, the way Jesus desires his followers—His Bride—to live. A temperate, balanced, disciplined, intentional life protects us from tethers that bind us to this world. And it’s a temperate, balanced, disciplined life that allows us to be wildly devoted to serving Jesus Christ and Him alone.

Rejoice!
Sue

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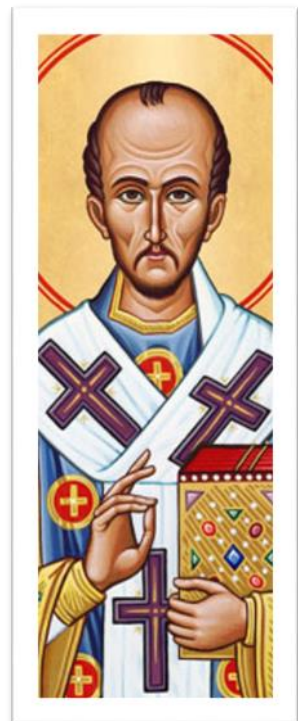
**All of my longings, all my dreams / Jesus is Lord of all /
All of my failures His power redeems / Jesus is Lord of all /
King of kings, Lord of lords / Jesus is Lord of all /
All my possessions and all my life / Jesus is Lord of all.**

"Lord of All"

**Text, William and Gloria Gaither; Music, William Gaither.
1973, Gaither Music Co.**

The Final Word: Saint John Chrysostom — Bishop of Antioch and Constantinople (344-407 AD); from his *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* [1 Cor. 9:25-27].

Paul wants to point out how much diligence is required in order to succeed. It is not enough merely to believe and then contend in any which way. Unless we have run our race in such a way as to be blameless and to come near to the prize, it will not benefit us. Here Paul is implying that the Corinthians are subject to the lusts of the belly and abandon themselves to it, fulfilling their own greediness under a pretense of liberty. If Paul, who had taught so many, was afraid of being rejected at the end, what can we say? Mere belief is not enough; we must behave in a way which is blameless if we hope to inherit salvation. If Paul felt the need to pommel his body, bring it into subjection, submit it to the authority of the soul, and place its impulses under the virtue of the soul—what can we say, being so much the lesser than Paul in our own virtue and racing to court, instead, deep indifference to all things? Be cautioned: this war admits of no truce.



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WE COVET YOUR PRAYERS!!!

Please continue to pray for Saint Brendan's and these various needs:

- Praise God for strength and healing which is coming to both of us.
- For strong and willing hands to come alongside of our labor; short-term or long-term.
- Praise God for our new Korg electronic keyboard and amplifier for the chapel! (And thanks to Dennis and Audrey!!)
- For necessary remodeling of the Priory House so that we can host more retreatants and guests.

Annual Membership Review

Every January we review and renew our membership roll for Saint Brendan's. Since there are no dues or forms to fill out, PLEASE make every effort (by the end of this month!) to notify us by phone, letter, or email that you would like to remain a part of the Fellowship. Otherwise, your name will be removed from our lists and this will be your last newsletter. Members will continue to receive our quarterly newsletters and have access to all of our study guides, *The Breviary*, and the *Rule of Life*. Members can also visit Saint Brendan's for retreat and contact us for prayer and spiritual direction. And remember, because there are no dues, we are always grateful for your gifts to help defray our administrative/ministry costs.

