

Today we are discussing the sins of the body: revelries, drunkenness, gluttony, and lust – things that do bring a certain passing measure of pleasure to us, and are therefore strong temptations which can easily become habitual sins. We previously spent some time discussing these sins themselves, but today we are particularly asking ourselves, during this “Illumination” cycle of our series on the seven deadly sins, what virtues to adopt in displacing these specific sins.

To start: the epistle lesson from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians beginning at the 16th verse sets up a contrast between the flesh and the Spirit. As the word implies, “flesh” refers to our natural, fallen state: all of us human beings are born into this world estranged from God and naturally bent towards ourselves. We are ruled by death, living in a grasping and self-centered mode. This is the life of the flesh.

But, having come to Christ in faith and submitted ourselves to *His* rule, we are given a new mode of being. We die to the grasping life of the flesh and rather live unto Christ. This is the life of the Spirit which prioritizes Christ above all, which worships God as revealed in Christ, and is empowered by the life of the Spirit of Christ in us.

St. Paul here explicitly states some typical behaviors and attitudes which characterize each of these modes of humanity. First he enumerates the sins of the flesh.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like[....]

Notice that sexual sins are given a prominent place in this list, and also that idolatry follows close behind; for sexual sins always lead to idolatry and vice versa. These two are coupled together in history as well as in contemporary practice. Witchcraft in the list refers both to the attempt to spiritually manipulate the world and other people, and also to “pharmacopoeia,” drug use. We could connect drunkenness and revelings with this as well, and though not explicitly mentioned, let us not overlook gluttony, which easily fits within the categories listed here. Finally we see things such as emulations (contentions), outbursts of wrath, jealousies, heresies, and strife. Who doesn’t love a good argument, right? “Let’s stir things up – make some excitement here!”

Of course, this list isn’t comprehensive: it ends with the phrase “and such like.” So there are more sins of bodily indulgence than are listed here. St. Paul just gives us a representative list of the selfish, fleshly, expression of fallen humanity. But then he also states, “I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Life in the flesh is a life separated from God, not just here and now, but in eternity. Knowing the right things matters little if you do not practice the right things, if you do not do the things that please God. Without Christ, one is bound by the flesh. Jesus is the only one who can break us free from “the bands of those sins” mentioned in the collect for the 24th Sunday after Trinity.

The epistle then continues with the contrasting life of the Spirit. The Apostle mentions in verse 18, "If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." This does not mean that if we have said a sinner's prayer or been baptized, then all behaviors are lawful for us. He is not talking about being free from the law in this sense. Being led by the Spirit implies that we aspire to a life that goes beyond the letter of the law. The law is to restrain those living in the flesh. Those led by the Spirit strive for righteousness which exceeds the boundaries of the law. This is what our current church season of Trinity is about. We desire to become more righteous, to grow in godliness and Christian piety. Thus we don't just avoid all of those things previously mentioned by St. Paul, but we seek to embrace the fruits of the Spirit enumerated for us by the Apostle beginning in verse 22.

Of particular interest for us this morning is Temperance. We understand this to be mastery over one's physical desires, be that for food, drink, or sex; and so temperance is often combined with chastity. In fact, the Offices of Instruction (page 286-289 in the prayer book), interpret the seventh commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery" to mean, "To keep my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity."

Temperance is a cardinal virtue, which even Greek and Roman pagans understood as valuable a good life. Some pagans viewed temperance as that moderation which provides for the best actual enjoyment of pleasure. In other words, too much of a good thing makes it less good, less enjoyable. Some realized also that temperance was required for a well-ordered society. The city needed mature people to function well – not just hedonists. Christianity, however, sees all obedience first as love to God; our focus moves from self-centered enjoyment or societal necessity, to a fuller enjoyment of Christ from whom all blessings flow.

The Christian expression of the language of virtues is based upon relationship, and specifically with relationship to the One True God. The pagan expression of virtues was not informed by Christ, and ended one way or another in the self, and was therefore ultimately isolating.

As members of Christ's Body, though, we are connected both to Christ and to each other in Christ. Christians are the true family of humanity, and that familial bond requires a death to the old self and a rebirth into this new family. This is the symbolism of baptism. We die to ourselves so that we can live to God. Through Jesus Christ, we have crucified our flesh, with its affections and lusts. And this is an ongoing, daily, challenge, as well as an act of God at the time of baptism: each day we must choose to deny our selfish desires for the sake of the love of God.

Now paired with our epistle lesson this morning is the miracle of the Healing of the Ten Lepers from The Gospel of St. Luke. Leprosy in the Hebrew mind was a symbol of uncleanness and sin. It was the rot of the life of the flesh made visible, and since the Hebrew culture was focused upon purity, lepers, in accordance with the Mosaic Law, were banished from normal society. This was both a spiritual sign of the purity of the people of God, and also a providential protection of the community for leprosy was contagious to some extent. This is a good warning for us today, for it is foolish that we should presume to closely associate with those who revel in the flesh and not be drawn into sin ourselves. Sin, too, is contagious. We must be mindful of the company we keep, not in a judgmental manner, but we should not overestimate our ability to withstand temptations that we bring upon ourselves.

Now the miracle begins with the lepers standing afar off. They are following the dictates of the Mosaic Law and showing a measure of concern, or just habitual obedience, to the laws of the community. They know, however, that this man has healed others, and they desire to be free from the corruption of the flesh, and thus they address Christ with a term of respect.

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” In the story, Jesus and His company are passing through regions of both Samaria and Galilee, so it is not surprising that both Samaritans and Jews are banded together in this leper colony. Without much show or fanfare, Jesus simply tells them to go show themselves to the priest. Again this is in accordance with the Mosaic Law, which stated that when one was cured from leprosy, the priest must make an examination to declare the person clean and fit to re-enter into society. Having heard the instructions from Jesus, the lepers obeyed, and as they went, they were healed.

But we further read that of the ten that Christ heals, only one turns back to give Him thanks. This one was a Samaritan, not a Jew, and he had the impulse to worship Christ by falling before Him in the deepest gratitude, glorifying God. Jesus, being God, receives this worship as is fitting. Christ also notes that only the Samaritan out of all of the lepers returned to give thanks and worship to God. Jesus then says to this one Samaritan, “Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.”

What are we to make of this statement? All of the lepers were healed, but Jesus only tells the one who worshiped Him that he is whole through faith. There is a sense that the other nine were still focused upon themselves, while the one Samaritan turned his focus to God as revealed in Christ. Thus he received a healing deeper than that of merely the body. He received the wholeness that can be found only in Christ. The other nine were truly healed of their disease. But this Samaritan received the forgiveness of sin of which the healing of the

body was the outward sign.

These lessons are important for informing our understanding of temperance. We've already mentioned that temperance is that cardinal virtue that opposes the sins of the body. Now there may be some people who by the sheer power of will are able to withstand the sins of the body. However, in the long-term, this struggle will engender bitterness. It is a denial of pleasure without a greater goal. Christian temperance requires striving toward a greater good, one that surpasses the short-term pleasures of the body.

Now should we deny ourselves such pleasures entirely? When used as intended by God in temperance and chastity, such pleasures are wonderful and beautiful things, but they should point us beyond the things themselves to the giver of those things. When the pleasures become the end in themselves, then we inevitably use other people and isolate ourselves. They become a prison. We make ourselves into lepers.

But Christ is the greatest good to which we must always turn. He alone becomes our goal, so that the pleasures of this world then become a means by which we glorify God more fully. When you eat a delicious meal, cooked with love and care, when you enjoy the fruit of the vine given to gladden the hearts of man, when you enjoy intimate moments with your spouse, when you enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done, when you experience any joy or ecstasy in this world—they are all signs of love from our Creator to elevate our hearts back to Him. This is true pleasure. No fornication or drunkenness or gluttonous grasping can compare in the least to the true response which God's gifts evoke in us.

Temperance, therefore, is *not* a denial of pleasure. It is a longing for the best pleasure, the eternal life that we have in Christ, in which we are overwhelmed with the goodness of God forever. What we experience now points us to what shall experience in the life of the world to come. There are real joys to be had in our present existence, but they cannot match what God has in store for us in the life of the world to come.

Finally, the collect today encapsulates these ideas for us in a brief and beautiful prayer. Let the love of Christ be our goal as His followers. Do not seek fulfillment from this world; that way leads to degradation and spiritual impoverishment. Rather seek to love God more: He is the fulfillment of all of our longings. Let us therefore turn around and rush back to Him falling down before Him in worship. In doing so, Christ speaks to us as He did to the Samaritan leper, "Arise, go your way, your faith has made you whole."

Let us pray.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.