

“Gratitude and Self-Control”

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Epistle of James, we hear that, “Every good gift and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father ...” Because of His love for you – He gives you that which is good and pleasing – gifts that not only benefit you in this life, but are also a foretaste of what heaven will be like. For instance, the Scriptures speak of heaven as a feast that has no end – but heaven is not just a feasting on food – but a feast for all the senses.

We only know what it is like to live in a world full of sin, as fallen sinners ourselves – which means that our eyes, ears, nose and touch are also impacted by sin. In heaven, where sin and its destruction are no more – our senses too are resurrected, to live as we were created to live, without sin – a feast of unimaginable delights and pleasures.

But already here, in this life, the heavenly Father gives you gifts – things of beauty and grandeur in nature that captivate your eyes – glorious sounds of nature and beautiful music to delight your ears – delicious and aromatic smells that please your nose – and sensual pleasures that bring joy to your sense of touch.

All good gifts to you from above – but the devil just can’t stand to see you receiving and enjoying gifts from your Father – so he seeks to spoil them.

Because all of these gifts bring such enjoyment to your life – the devil tempts you to love the gifts and their pleasure far more than you love your heavenly Father who gives such gifts.

Do you remember the account of the rich man and poor Lazarus? The rich man wore the finest clothes – he ate the best food – and he lived in the lap of luxury every day – but he did not receive and make use of these gifts as our heavenly Father intended.

To use St. Paul’s words to us tonight – the rich man’s god is his belly. His mind was set on earthly thing. He was a glutton – for gluttony is the inordinate desire for food and drink – but it can also be used for the excessive desire of any of life’s pleasures.

It's understandable that you are attracted to the pleasures of this world – after all, they are pleasurable. But what makes one a glutton is when the devil leads you to trespass – to go beyond, to demand more pleasure from something than your heavenly Father has intended with His gift.

For instance, to demand more pleasure from food than the Father has intended leads to the sin of overeating. To demand more pleasure from alcohol than the Father has intended leads to the sin of drunkenness.

The sin of gluttony is the perverted appetite for more and more of an earthly pleasure – an appetite that cannot be satisfied. But even worse is the sin that lies behind gluttony – of thinking that this life is all there is – the sin of thinking that if you don't grab all that life has to offer now – you'll miss out, and never experience those pleasures again.

What makes gluttony so dangerous is that it denies your spiritual nature and promotes the lie that “this is all there is” so you better try to make your heaven on earth, right now. But as with all sin, it creates not a “heaven” but hell on earth.

This is what makes gluttony so deadly – it is the constant pursuit of earthly pleasures – to the point that, faith, hope and trust in that which is heavenly and eternal – is deadened. In this way gluttony suffocates, and then finally, kills the soul.

The Lord who created you and has given you gifts with earthly pleasures – has also built into you ways that limit how much you should enjoy. If you eat too much, you become uncomfortable, and feel sick. If you drink too much – your body cannot be controlled, and even revolts. If you seek too much of a life of leisure – you get bored and restless.

So that you may receive His gifts for your good – gluttony is offset by temperance and self-control.

Temperance is the virtue that accepts the natural limits that the Lord has created for earthly pleasure. Food can be enjoyed abundantly without making your stomach your god (controlling your life, telling you what to do). Alcohol can bring joy and festivity without turning you into a foolish drunk. And leisure can be enjoyed as an appropriate and needed break from your daily work.

Self-control is applying these limits to your life. Keeping your self and your body under subjection prevents the suffocating and deadening effects of gluttony.

Our Lenten discipline leads us to meditate upon the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. It is for our sin that He suffers and dies – including the sin of gluttony – which He overcomes, even as He is deprived of all food and drink, and “thirsts” for our salvation.

In this meditation upon the suffering and death of your Savior – you contemplate your own mortality – that your present body will someday die, along with all the fleeting pleasures of this life. This meditation brings temperance and self-control to your life.

Contemplating the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ and your own resurrection – brings you to the simple realization that this life is not all that there is – and that the feasting which is to come is far more rich and satisfying than anything you can imagine here on earth.

So tonight, you can be thankful that you have a heavenly Father who loves to give you all good things – thankful that you have a heavenly Father who loves to delight all your senses with earthly pleasures – thankful that all the joys and pleasures of this life are merely a foretaste of the life to come for you – thankful that, in Christ Jesus, He gives you a life which knows no end.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.