



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 22 November 1978

1. In the course of the Audiences of my pontifical ministry I have tried to carry out the "testament" of my beloved Predecessor John Paul I. As is known, he did not leave a written testament, because death took him unexpectedly and suddenly, but he left some notes which showed that he had intended, at the first Wednesday meetings, to speak of the fundamental principles of Christian life. That is, he had intended to speak of the three theological virtues (he had time to do this) and then of the four cardinal virtues, (this is being done by his unworthy Successor). Today the turn has come to speak of the fourth cardinal virtue, "temperance", thus completing, in a some way, John Paul I's programme, in which we can see the testament, as it were, of the late Pope.

2. When we speak of virtues—not only these cardinal ones, but all of them, every virtue—we must always have in mind the real man, the actual man. Virtue is not something abstract, detached from life, but, on the contrary, it has deep "roots" in life itself, it springs from the latter and forms it. Virtue has an impact on man's life, on his actions and behaviour. It follows that, in all these reflections of ours, we are speaking not so much of the virtue as of man living and acting "virtuously"; we are speaking of the prudent, just and courageous man, and finally, precisely today, we are speaking of the "temperate" (or "sober") man. Let us add at once that all these attributes, or rather attitudes of man, coming from the single cardinal virtues, are connected with one another. So it is not possible to be a really prudent man, or an authentically just one, or a truly strong one, unless one also has the virtue of temperance. It can be said that this virtue indirectly conditions all other virtues, but it must also be said that all the other virtues are indispensable for man to be "temperate" (or "sober").

3. The term "temperance" itself seems in a certain way to refer to what is "outside man". We say, in fact, that a temperate man is one who does not abuse food, drinks, pleasures, who does not drink alcohol to excess, who does not deprive himself of consciousness by the use of drugs, etc. This reference to elements external to man has its basis, however, within man. It is as if there existed in each of us a "higher self" and a "lower self". In our "lower self", our "body" and everything that belongs to it is expressed: its needs, its desires, its passions of a sensual nature particularly. The virtue of temperance guarantees every man mastery of the "lower self" by the "higher self". Is this a humiliation of our body? Or a disability? On the contrary, this mastery gives higher value to the body. As a result of the virtue of temperance, the body and our senses find the right place which pertains to them in our human condition. A temperate man is one who is master of himself. One in whom passions do not prevail over reason, will, and even the "heart". A man who can control himself! If this is so, we can easily realize what a fundamental and radical value the virtue of temperance has. It is even indispensable, in order that man may be fully a man. It is enough to

look at some one who, carried away by his passions, becomes a "victim" of them—renouncing of his own accord the use of reason (such as, for example, an alcoholic, a drug addict)—to see clearly that "to be a man" means respecting one's own dignity, and therefore, among other things, letting oneself be guided by the virtue of temperance.⁴ This virtue is also called "sobriety". And rightly so! In fact, to be able to control our passions, the lust of the flesh, the explosions of sensuality (for example in relations with the other sex) etc., we must not go beyond the rightful limit with regard to ourselves and our "lower self". If we do not respect this rightful limit, we will not be able to control ourselves. This does not mean that the virtuous, sober man cannot be "spontaneous", cannot enjoy, cannot weep, cannot express his feelings; that is, it does not mean that he must become insensitive, "indifferent", as if he were made of ice or stone. No, not at all! It is enough to look at Jesus to be convinced of this. Christian morality has never been identified Stoic morality. On the contrary, considering all the riches of affections and emotivity with which every man is endowed—each in a different way, moreover: man in one way, woman in another owing to her own sensitivity—it must be recognized that man cannot reach this mature spontaneity unless by means of continuous work on himself and special "vigilance" over his whole behaviour. The virtue of "temperance", of "sobriety" consists, in fact in this.⁵ I think, too, that this virtue demands from each of us a specific humility with regard to the gifts that God has put in our human nature. I would say "humility of the body" and that "of the heart". This humility is a necessary condition for man's interior "harmony": for man's "interior" beauty. Let everyone think it over carefully; and in particular young men, and even more young women, at the age when one is so anxious to be handsome or beautiful in order to please others! Let us remember that man must above all be beautiful interiorly. Without this beauty, all efforts aimed at the body alone will not make—either him or her—a really beautiful person. Is it not just the body, moreover, that undergoes considerable and often even serious damage to health, if man lacks the virtue of temperance, of sobriety? In this connection, the statistics and files of hospitals all over the world, could say a great deal. Also doctors who work on the advisory bureaus to which married couples, fiancés and young people apply, have great experience of this. It is true that we cannot judge virtue on the exclusive basis of the criterion of psychophysical health; there are many proofs, however, that the lack of the virtue, of temperance, sobriety, damages health.⁶ I must end here, although I am convinced that this subject is interrupted rather than exhausted. Perhaps there will be an opportunity one day to return to it. For the present this is enough. I have tried in this way, as well as I could, to follow John Paul I's testament. I ask him to pray for me, when I shall have to pass to other topics during the Wednesday audiences. *The Pope then addressed a special greeting to the sick and to newly-weds.* Let a specially affectionate greeting now go to the sick. All of you who are suffering, know that the Pope has a predilection for you because you are called to take part more closely in the Saviour's redeeming Passion and because the evangelical beatitude: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (cf. Mt 5:4), belongs to you. Take heart! The Pope is with you: your suffering is not vain, but constitutes the riches of the Church. May my special blessing comfort you. I am happy to address a word now to the newly-weds present here and to all young couples who with their love, blessed and sanctified by virtue of the Sacrament of Marriage, have started a new life. To you I say: do not be afraid to give a Christian stamp to your new family: Christ is with you! He is near you to make stable and indissoluble the bond that unites you in mutual donation. He is near you to sustain you in the midst of the difficulties and trials that are, indeed, inevitable but not insuperable, and never destructive of married love when it is authentic and not selfish. With these happy wishes, the Pope blesses you in the Lord's joy. © Copyright 1978 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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