

**Homily for Thursday of the Second Week of Lent
March 20, 2014**

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Hales Corners, WI**

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My dear brothers [and sisters] in Christ, in our Gospel today, we hear the story of a rich man who, after his death and burial, suffered in torment in the netherworld. The Scriptures do not speak so much of what he *did* to deserve his punishment. It is, rather, what he did *not* do that would bring him to that place of suffering. He failed to follow the great commandment to love his neighbor, who is identified as a poor man named Lazarus.

The root of that failure can be found in the description that is given of the rich man. The Scriptures tell us that he was a man “who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day” (Luke 16:19). We can be pretty confident in saying that this man was guilty of the deadly sin of gluttony. When we hear that word, we might think just of one who eats to excess, but we might consider gluttony to refer to an excess of anything, including drink, entertainment, possessions, etc. This can be seen in the fact that he is identified as wearing purple garments of fine

linen. Pope St. Gregory the Great comments on this point by writing:

Now if the wearing of fine and precious robes were not a fault, the Word of God would never have so carefully expressed this. For no one seeks costly garments except for vainglory, that he may seem more honorable than others; for no one wishes to be clothed with such, where he cannot be seen by others.¹

Being so completely focused on the disordered attachment to his own appetites and passions had the result of the rich man being so self centered that he was not able to see what was taking place around him, particularly the suffering of this poor man lying at his very door.

We must be ever attentive to how easy it is for us to become slaves to our senses and our various appetites. As mentioned, it is not enough just to watch how much we eat and how much we drink; gluttony is even farther reaching than that. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis describes a type of gluttony as “a desire to have things exactly our way.” He gives the example of food having to be prepared just right, or in just the right amount, but it isn’t limited to food. We might complain about unimportant defects in a product, the temperature in the room, or the color of a laundry basket. There is a certain amount of discomfort to be expected in life, but

the glutton will have none of it. Instead of becoming strong by suffering the minor inconveniences of life, the glutton insists on being pampered.

Lent is a privileged time that the Church offers us to combat these defects in our lives. We are invited to make sacrifices for the purpose of putting to death those inordinate desires of both body as soul so as not to become slaves to them. Reflecting on the lesson from the Gospel, we can see how the elimination of those unhealthy appetites can help us to turn our gaze outward to see the needs of others, not being so consumed with satisfying our own selfish desires. Having practiced this self-denial, we become open to more authentically practice another traditional Lenten practice, that of almsgiving.

All Christians are invited to live the virtue of temperance which is defined in the Catechism as “the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods.”² Practicing this virtue will yield benefits physically and spiritually, both now and in eternity. Those who are able to control themselves with regards to these appetites are able to focus their attention and energy on those things which are of the highest importance in seeking to live a life of holiness.

As men preparing for Holy Orders, it is important to give serious attention to rooting out these areas of weakness. The priest is called to offer a total gift of self to the Church and to those to whom he is called to minister. Being too attached to our own interests and passions drains us of the energy that our people deserve to have directed toward them. A lack of temperance can cause us to place our own wants, our own comforts, or our own wills before the will of God and the needs of His people, thus rendering us less effective instruments of His grace and mercy.

This is not to say, of course, that we should totally forget ourselves and the legitimate needs that we have for rest, exercise, and nourishment. We must practice good stewardship of the body, for it is an essential part of who we are as human beings. The challenge, though, is to ensure that our motives do not become self-serving but that we seek these things for the sole purpose of giving glory to God and working more energetically for the salvation of souls.

As we continue our celebration of the Eucharist this morning, may we be mindful of those areas in our lives where we still find ourselves struggling to maintain a proper balance. Let us ask, that as we are nourished with the Bread of Life, we may have the strength to more

willingly practice the virtue of temperance so as to direct our motives and energy toward being of service to God and His people, preparing ourselves and them for the reward that brings true satisfaction and peace in the glory of Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope St. Gregory the Great, Quoted from the *Catena Aurea* compiled by St. Thomas Aquinas.

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1809.