

**Leadership Circle**

**March, 2017**

**“Self Mastery or Temperance”**

**“Virtue Corner”**

Doing the right thing, the ethical thing, is not always easy. Sometimes it’s hard to know what the right thing is – prudence helps there. Other times it’s hard to stay on the right track amidst opposition, difficulties, or sacrifice – the core value of perseverance helps with that. But there’s another, powerful obstacle to ethical living: our deep yearning for pleasure. Self-mastery governs the healthy fulfillment of that yearning.

There are many kinds of pleasure. Those deriving from food and drink, sexual intimacy, possessions, and physical comforts are among the most common. Some people experience pleasure from having power over others, some from gaining public recognition. Money, not a pleasure in itself, is charged with the possibilities of the pleasures it can buy.

Experiencing pleasure is natural – God invented pleasure as well as the capacity to enjoy. The problem, however, comes when certain pleasures get the upper hand in life, when lasting, moral goods (like fidelity, family, friendship, justice, fairness, honesty...) get crowded out by passing, pleasurable goods. Fallen human nature has a tendency to do just that, as history’s constant flow of graft, bribery, and other forms of corruption proves.

Intemperance distorts and slows emotional development. St. Thomas refers to intemperance as a childish vice. Unchecked pleasure is like a spoiled child who is left to his curiosity and passions without restraint. Taking a unruly child to a department store can be overwhelming for there virtually no end to what a child thinks he needs. In the same way an intemperate adult strays from the order of reason. Moreover, a child left to his own will becomes more self-centered. Similarly, the concupiscible power left to itself, without the self-mastery, gains strength and becomes less and less able to subject itself to the direction of reason, like the spoiled child.

The remedy is the same as for a spoiled child. They are helped by being taught restraint. So too, it is by directing our pleasures, we moderate them according to the demands of virtue. The will must be free, but a person who is at the mercy of his own concupiscence is not a free man, but a slave. spoiled child. Similarly, temperance brings about a spiritual or moral beauty to the person who has cultivated it,

*Temperance is the first virtue that perfects man’s ability to act well with one’s self from within one’s self.*

## **Arrivals/Cocktails/Buffer Dinner (30 Minutes)**

***Share a quick meal and wine together before beginning the circle. Catch up on the last month, and on how you did with last month's resolution.***

## **Gospel Reflection (30 minutes)**

Galatians 5: 16-26

Instead I tell you, be guided by the Spirit, and you will no longer yield to self-indulgence. The desires of self-indulgence are always in opposition to the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are in opposition to self-indulgence... When self-indulgence is at work the results are obvious: sexual vice, impurity, and sensuality, the worship of false gods and sorcery; antagonisms and rivalry. jealousy, bad temper and quarrels, disagreements, factions and malice, drunkenness, orgies and all such things. And about these, I tell you now as I have told you in the past, that people who behave in these ways will not inherit the kingdom of God. On the other hand the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control; no law can touch such things as these. All who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified self with all its passions and its desires. Since we are living by the Spirit, let our behavior be guided by the Spirit and let us not be conceited or provocative and envious of one another.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What are some of the common expressions we face of self-indulgence?
2. Do we experience the opposition of the desires of the Spirit and the desires of self indulgence?
3. What does it mean to be guided by the Spirit? How to we practice that in daily life?
4. Paul says that no law can touch the "fruits" of the Spirit. What does that mean?
5. What is the relationship between belonging to Christ and thus "crucifying" the self, with letting our behavior be guided by the Spirit? Perhaps this is the heart of self mastery?

## **Case Study (30 Minutes)**

**2 ways to go about it.** *Read the Case and discuss afterwards how it can apply to your own living of self mastery or of Lent. Or ask a member to voluntarily offer their challenges in practicing self mastery at home, in the work place or in their personal life. The circle can offer some personal experiences on how they have confronted and resolved similar difficulties.*

Self mastery is about leading ourselves to our true end, the best version of ourselves, which coincides with the freedom found in Christ and realizing his plan for us. There is fear to fully embrace the little deaths that are necessary in learning freedom in Christ.

**Discuss these 3 tips on growing in self mastery.**

### **1. Talk To Yourself, Talk to God.**

There's a voice inside your head, and that's completely normal. It's your internal dialogue, the inner commentary that strives to make sense of the world, ourselves and God. The first crucial step in developing self-mastery is to become an observer of your thoughts—to become self-aware, self-reflective. To be proactive not reactive.

A lack of **mindfulness** will respond to external stimulus immediately with an emotional response. Self-mastery causes a pattern break and allows for an internal interpretation to take place. Stop, fully observe the emotions welling up inside you and the thoughts that present themselves.

Prayer and fasting can be key to this internal awareness and openness to listen to the voice of God and his Holy Spirit. Lent is a time for increased prayer... what might you do in your prayer.

### **2. Make Peace With Your Past, Forgive**

While there's truth in the statement, we're the sum total of our experiences, self-mastery recognizes we're certainly not confined to them. It's not easy to do; our experiences or habits, particularly negatives have a way of seeping deep into our soul. But although some stains can't be removed, we can choose not to wear those clothes again.

A personal example, I made peace with my father and our lack of relationship: Acknowledging the post-war trauma he was no doubt affected by, and that he had to play the father role in light of a difficult script. Self-mastery meant not allowing past negative experiences the power of emotional collateral to spark present and future

fires. As a result, the clean slate has given birth to the relationship I'd always desired.

Making peace with your past allows you an untarnished and more objective approach to the present, ideally resulting in a positive future. It's hard to pick up anything new when your hands are full with burdens. It means to let go, **forgive**, and as humanly possible, to forget.

### **3. Audit Yourself, self-examination**

Have an honest assessment of your strengths and your weaknesses. That means dropping the pride and ego and owning up to your ugly parts. The first step to recovery is admitting you have a problem. Self-mastery has to start with self-honesty. Then taking this brokenness to the Lord in prayer and repentance, can be a great means to continued self mastery.

#### **Question for Discussion:**

1. In Lent we are called to greater prayer, fasting and almsgiving. How do these steps of self mastery relate to that?
2. Which area or appetite do you find it hardest to master and what might be some helpful ways to grow in self mastery there?
3. What was your best Lent ever and why? Any take aways or best practices to share with your lumen brothers.
4. What are the benefits found in prayer, fasting and generosity?
5. Which of these three recommendations to growth in self mastery might be best to practice for you?

## Core Value Assessment and Resolution (10 minutes)

What struck me in this circle and how I might apply it to my THINKING. What CRITICAL ISSUES am I facing? What is the biggest CHALLENGES with these issues I face and what OPPORTINITIES does it present.

*Prayer:*

*Family:*

*Business:*

*Lumen Action:*

What ACTION STEPS can I take now or long term? Develop a concrete resolution for how you can improve in your efforts to exercise Christian charity in you interactions with others during the next month. Your resolution should be a specific action or activity that is easily measured.

## **Further Reading**

<http://www.skipprichard.com/success-starts-with-self-mastery-7-effective-strategies/>

<http://catholicphilly.com/2017/03/news/national-news/fasting-lents-spiritual-practice-creates-space-for-prayer/>

[http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/03/01/pope\\_francis\\_celebrates\\_ash\\_wednesday\\_mass\\_full\\_text/1295847](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/03/01/pope_francis_celebrates_ash_wednesday_mass_full_text/1295847)