



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 10 January 2024

[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Cycle of Catechesis. Vices and Virtues. 3. *Gluttony*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In the journey of catechesis that we are doing on vices and virtues, today we will take a look at the vice of *gluttony*.

What does the Gospel tell us about this? Let us look at Jesus. His first miracle, at the wedding at Cana, reveals his sympathy towards human joys: he is concerned that the feast should end well and gives the bride and groom a large quantity of very good wine. In all his ministry, Jesus appears as a prophet who is very different from the Baptist. While John is remembered for his asceticism — he ate what he found in the desert — Jesus instead is the Messiah whom we often see at table. His behaviour causes scandal in some quarters, because not only is he benevolent towards sinners, but he even eats with them; and this gesture demonstrates his readiness for communion and closeness with everyone.

But there is even more. Although Jesus' attitude towards the Jewish precepts reveals his full

submission to the Law, he nonetheless shows himself to be sympathetic towards his disciples. When they are found wanting, because they pluck grain out of hunger on the Sabbath, he condones them, recalling that even King David and his companions had taken the sacred bread when they were in need (cf. *Mk* 2:23-26). And Jesus affirms a new principle: the wedding guests cannot fast when the bridegroom is with them. They will fast when the bridegroom will be taken away from them. By this point everything is relative to Jesus. When he is in our midst, we cannot be in mourning, but at the hour of his passion, then yes, we fast (cf. *Mk* 2:18-20). Jesus wants us to be joyful in his company — he is like the bridegroom of the Church, but he also wants us to participate in his suffering, which is also the suffering of the small and the poor.

Another important aspect. Jesus *eliminates the distinction between pure and impure foods*, which was a distinction made by Jewish law. In reality, Jesus teaches that it is not what enters man that contaminates him, but what comes out of his heart. And by so saying, “he declared all foods clean” (*Mk* 7:19). This is why Christianity does not consider unclean foods. But the attention we have to have is an interior one: thus one that is not about food per se but about our relationship with it. And with regards to this, Jesus clearly says that what makes something good or bad, let’s say about food, is not food in itself but the relationship we have with it. And we see this when a person has a disordered relationship with food; we see how they eat, they eat hastily, as though with the urge to be full but without ever being sated. They do not have a good relationship with food, they are slaves to food. This serene relationship that Jesus established with food should be rediscovered and valued, especially in so-called affluent societies, where many *imbalances* and many *pathologies* manifest themselves. One eats too much, or too little. Often one eats in solitude. Eating disorders — anorexia, bulimia, obesity — are spreading. And medicine and psychology are trying to tackle our poor relationship with food. A poor relationship with food produces all these illnesses.

They are illnesses, often extremely painful, that are mostly linked to sufferings of the psyche and the soul. The way we eat is the manifestation of something within: a predisposition to balance or immoderation; the capacity to give thanks or the arrogant presumption of autonomy; the empathy of those who share food with the needy, or the selfishness of those who hoard everything for themselves. This question is so important. Tell me how you eat, and I will tell you what kind of soul you have. In the way we eat, we reveal our inner selves, our habits, our psychological attitudes.

The ancient Fathers gave the vice of gluttony the name “*gastrimargia*”, a term that can be translated as “folly of the belly”. Gluttony is a “folly of the belly”. There is also this proverb, that we should eat to live, not live to eat. Gluttony is a vice that engages one of our vital needs, such as eating. Let us beware of this.

If we interpret it from a *social* point of view, gluttony is perhaps the most dangerous vice that *is killing the planet*. Because the sin of those who succumb before a piece of cake, all things considered, does not cause great damage, but the voracity with which we have been plundering

the goods of the planet for some centuries now is compromising the future of all. We have grabbed everything in order to become the masters of all things, whereas everything had been consigned to us for us to protect, not for us to exploit. Here, then, is the great sin, the fury of the belly is a great sin. We have abjured the name of men, to assume another: “consumers”. Today we speak like this in social life: consumers. We did not even notice when someone first began to call us by this name. We were made in order to be “Eucharistic” men and women, capable of giving thanks, discreet in the use of the land, and instead the danger is that we turn into predators. And now we are realizing that this form of “gluttony” has done great harm to the world. Let us ask the Lord to help us on the road to sobriety, so that the many forms of gluttony do not take over our life.

Special Greetings

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those coming from Korea and the United States of America.

I also welcome the priests from the Institute for Continuing Theological Education at the Pontifical North American College. Upon all of you, and upon your families, I invoke the joy and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to young people, to the sick, to the elderly and to newlyweds — they are many. I invite everyone to always act in the newness of life indicated to us by the Son of God, who took on flesh to save men and women.

Let us renew our closeness to the dear, tried people of Ukraine with prayer, as well as to all those who are suffering from the horror of war in Palestine and Israel, and in other parts of the world. Let us pray, let us pray for these people who are at war and let us pray to the Lord, so that he may sow the seed of peace in the hearts of the leaders of nations.

I offer my blessing to all of you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: in our continuing catechesis on the vices and the virtues, we now consider the sin of gluttony. As a guest at the wedding feast of Cana, Jesus taught the goodness of food and drink, and the joy of table fellowship. Rejecting the ritual distinction between pure and impure foods, the Lord turns our attention to our personal relationship with the consumption of

food. In societies troubled by eating disorders and which, all too often, waste great amounts of food even as many people in our world go hungry, our eating habits should be moderate and socially responsible. May the prayers we say in thanksgiving for God's gift of our daily bread, inspire us to be mindful of our responsibility towards others and virtuous in our enjoyment of the good things of this earth.