

## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Cycle C-2025

In her song “Self-Control,” Laura Branigan sings: “You take my self, you take my self-control.” Looking at these words through the lens of faith, “what” are the things and “who” are the people that often lead us to lose self-control? On a personal level, my willpower tends to crumble in the face of my guttural love for food. I consider it one of the most enjoyable and sacred pleasures of life. Most of the time this is a good thing, but when I eat too much, or too much of the wrong thing, without a sustained commitment to proper diet and exercise, my overall well-being is negatively affected.

Self-control can be defined as: “The ability to exhibit restraint when our impulses want us to act differently, and/or our ability to shelve or resist temptation at a stressful moment because we want to achieve a greater goal.” The greater goal we want to achieve can be motivated by personal, relational, career, and/or

religious reasons. In our reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, in speaking about the Holy Spirit, St. Paul states: “For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.” On the surface, all this talk about self-control seems like it would cramp our style and take all the fun and spontaneity out of our lives. We tend to resist boundaries being placed on our thoughts and actions.

We may be more inclined to embrace a life of self-control if we can see all the ways that it personally benefits us. Research has shown that the development of self-control in childhood is often an important predictor of success in adulthood. Higher levels of self-control tend to bring about academic achievement, financial stability, and stable relationships. It also contributes to increased mental and physical health and a decrease in impulsive, addictive, and sinful behavior. It significantly increases the likelihood of success in all areas of our life and contributes to greater overall life happiness and satisfaction. Studies make it abundantly clear that a daily commitment to self-control prepares us

for a more blessed present and future. It helps us to align our actions with our long-term goals.

To understand self-control in its richest and fullest context, it is important to see how it connects with our relationship with Jesus Christ. St. Paul reveals self-control as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. This reveals that it is essential in a good Christian life and helps us to grow stronger in our intimacy with Jesus Christ. It is a sign of personal and spiritual maturity. Self-control becomes a wall of defense for us in our experience of temptation. In fact, by exercising self-control during temptation we can flip the script. St. John Vianney states: “Offer your temptation for the conversion of sinners. When the devil sees you doing this, he is beside himself with rage and makes off, because the temptation is turned against himself.”

Self-control provides protection against sin, the progression of sin, and the consequences of our sins. It helps to prevent our inner demons and outside influences from getting the best of us. The philosopher Epictetus states: “No person is free who is not master of himself.” Even though these words

convey truth, our personal self-control is a limited resource. As a people of faith, we believe our willpower needs to be continually touched, replenished, and fortified, through the Holy Spirit. This comes through the spiritual power of a daily and lifelong union with, and growth in, our relationship with Jesus. The power which comes to us through Christ enables us to more habitually experience personal, spiritual, and moral victories, as we move from cowardice to courage and live in the power of His Spirit. As the victories pile up, we are better able to display the character of God to the world around us. We do this through our holiness of life, and through the dignity and respect that we extend to all people.

In addition to, and flowing from our relationship with Jesus Christ, “How can we grow in self-control?” Research shows that self-control is like a muscle that needs to be strengthened through continual practice. New findings in neuroscience reveal that “action comes before motivation not the other way around.” So, Nike had it right after all, “Just do it,” and good things will eventually follow. In the beginning, it is best

to strive for smaller acts of self-restraint. As this muscle grows, we can stretch ourselves with greater and more frequent acts of self-control. Research reveals that the region of the brain that generates will power “grows stronger each time we persevere through discomfort or pain.” This reveals that it is crucial for us to hang in there when the going gets tough. A new and deepened sense of mental and spiritual well-being and growth awaits us on the other side of our temporary suffering.

Self-control requires the humility to acknowledge, what people and situations tempt us the most, so that as much as humanly possible, we can minimize or completely avoid our exposure. Routine is also important. The establishment of a daily or regular routine of prayer, exercise, proper rest, and people and practices that renew and strengthen us, can foster and promote a spirit of self-control. Our self-control can also reach new heights and new depths as we strive to live each day with a deliberate focus on the depth of our union with Jesus Christ, the confession of our sins,

growing in His love, doing His will, and properly preparing ourselves for our eternal destiny.

Self-control is closely associated with the virtue of temperance or moderation. It involves moderation in how we embrace and express our thoughts and feelings, and indulge in the legitimate, healthy, and holy pleasures of this life. We are better able to make wise choices. We deal with pleasurable things in a balanced and reasonable manner. This contributes to a sense of well-being and helps us to more fully thrive in our lives.

Getting back to my love of food, I have found that whenever I approach food in a moderate manner, in terms of amount and types of food, I savor and cherish the experience more deeply. I also experience a sense of internal and physical well-being. Moderation helps us to experience the pleasures of this life as God intended, to the fullest extent possible, and in a manner that unites us closer to Him and fills our hearts with gratitude, awe, and wonder. Grenville Keiser said it best when he stated: “By constant self-discipline and self-control you can develop greatness

in character.” In other words, we come to experience a growing greatness through, with, and in, Jesus Christ, as we daily strive to become living saints.