6th Sunday after Trinity
Series on 7 Deadly Sins
Bessemer - 1959

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IN NOMINE JESU

I Corinthians 10: 31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

GLUTTONY

Let me begin this sermon on gluttony by saying first of all that GOD IS NOT A CRANK. GOD IS NOT A KILL-JOY! There are ~~not a few~~ many who would regard Jesus not as the Lord of gladness, but as the One who, by His extreme demands, would take away from them what little pleasure they get out of life; as the pale Galilaean who has turned the world pale with His breath. In the Creed we confess: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. In so stating we are underlining the words of Genesis: And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. What was good enough for God to create is certainl good enough for us to enjoy. When our Lord Jesus walked upon the face of the earth, He enjoyed good food and was a welcome Guest at a wedding party. The Pharisees, who had begun to identify religious superiority with ascetic fasting, accused Him of being a glutton and a drunkard because He refused to wear a long face The falsity of their charge needs no proof. But As is very evident from the Gospels, Jesus thoroughly enjoyed life, the blessings and bounties of creation - but always in ~~its~~ their proper perspective. For Him the love of God with heart and soul and strength and mind came first. Everything He did, He did to the glory of His heavenly Father. His advice for those who would really enjoy life is: Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things (the material things for your enjoyment) will be added unto you. St. Paul echoes the same thought in our text: Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

There are some people who imagine that because several have over-indulged in the pleasures of life, the pleasures themselves are sinful. Such is the feeling of many concerning alcohol. But this is not so. Alcoholic beverages are not evil in themselves any more than nuclear fission is evil in itself. Says the Psalmist: He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man...and wine that maketh glad the heart of man. The cocktail hour can be a time of real renewal; we can be lifted out of the ruts into which the day has taken us, our

imaginations can be inspired, our vision cleared. This gift can help break down the barriers between people, can make introverts more extrovert. A martini before dinner can put a new face on things, enabling those who have evening tasks to approach them with more freshness. Just the right wine can dignify a course at dinner and play its part in the glory of an evening. Those who argue that people of sobriety should abstain because some people get drunk do not deny themselves automobiles because of the deaths and injuries caused by bad drivers. On the other hand, a person well-directed in spirit may begin the evening to be spent with his family and friends with refreshment which may well be viewed as a way of helping him to turn his mind away from various pressing problems of the day so that he may enter more fully into the life that is around him, and thus come back to his problems with a renewed perspective. The point is, however, that whatever we do should be done to the glory of God - that He might in all things be honored by our lives.

Of course, there are some people who cannot drink without going to excess. We don't have to look very far to see drink as the means of the destruction of personality, the breaker of home life. There are some people who cannot eat certain kinds of food, because they are alergic to them. There are some people who cannot live in certain types of climate due to rheumatism, hay fever, asthma, etc. There are some people who cannot go in a boat without getting seasick. There are some people who cannot smoke without doing injury to their bodies. I am reminded of the answer the Episcopal priest gave a Baptist lady who asked if the Episcopal Church believed in smoking. Yes, he said, but not as generally necessary to salvation. Each of us must be able to determine which of life's pleasures we can enjoy without hurting ourselves, our fellow men, and especially without dishonoring God. St. Paul put it this way: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

It is not the materials of God's creation that are evil; in fact, they

are very good. The evil is found in man's misuse of that which is intended to be a boon and a blessing. And this is where the sin of gluttony fits in. The philosophy of countless millions living today (and might I add not a few who would claim the name Christian) might be stated in the words of the ancient Chinese: Enjoy yourself; it's later than you think, or in the well-known Epicurean assertion: Eat, drink, and be merry; for tomorrow you die. To drink to the dregs the pleasures of life is the end of their existence. But upon closer examination it will become apparent that those who wholehearted throw themselves into the quest for enjoyment actually enjoy life the least. The glutton, bound to the bread-basket, bent on nothing else than filling his stomach, is really not happy. The drunkard, chained to the bottle, is not happy, The playboy and the harlot, enslaved by their passions, are not in the real sense of the word happy. They are not happy because they have no purpose in life higher than the gratification of their appetites. There is keen insight in the story of the young man who came to a renowned doctor in Paris complaining of dejection and nausea at life, and asking what he could do to get well. The doctor with a trace of envy pictured the happy state of the young blade Grimaldi, who was leader of the younger set in Paris night clubs. Go to him, said the doctor; let him show you how to enjoy yourself, and you will get well. The downcast young patient looked up and said, Sir, I am Grimaldi.

Jesus made it very clear that no one can worship the god of pleasure and at the same time hope for eternal life. To His disciples He gave this warning: Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting (which simply means overeating), and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. St. Paul states in no mistakable terms: Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. With true pastoral concern the same apostle writes in tears to the Christians at Philippi, many of whom had forsaken the way of Christ in the interest of pleasure and their

appetites: For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destructi whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. Notice that Paul calls these gluttonous, belly-worshipers within the chu at Philippi enemies of the cross of Christ. St. Peter admonishes the Christians in Asia Minor: Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And he tells them why: the end of all things is at hand. Again he exhorts: Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. The man whose mind is numb and lazy due to overeating, whose senses are dulled because of drink, does not make a good soldier. He is easy prey for th enemy. So with the Christian. His mind is to be clear and alert, his senses sharp, so that the devil does not come upon him unawares. He is to be watchful unto prayer, constantly drawing upon the resources and strength of the Almighty to ward off the enemy, so that he does not succumb to temptation and lose the crown of life.

The clue to really happy and joyful living is found in St. Paul's magnificent obsession: For me to live is Christ. Make no mistake about it - Christianity is no cheap religion. It includes far more than saying, I'm a Christian, going to church when one feels like it, and contributing what one pleases. True, salvation is wholly by grace. It is as free as the air we breathe. All that is necessary is a sincere acceptance of Christ and His merits. Up to that point Christianity is indeed cheap. It costs us nothing - because it cost Him everything! But - and mark this well - in that moment in which we by faith receive Christ into our hearts, He takes over, claims complete possession, and Christianity becomes for us the most expensive thing in the world. It takes all we have, and asks for more. Paul found that out. That is why he said, For me to live is Christ He wanted to say: My life is Christ; Christ is my life. He is my Master; I am His slave. He tells me what to think, and I think it; what to say, and I say it; what to do, and I do it. And all that which is not Christ is ruled out. That is the price of following Christ and having His joy.

Now the supreme question of my life must be: What would Jesus say? Can I take Jesus with me? Would He approve of what I'm doing? He who has redeemed me with His own crimson blood, purchased and won me from sin, death, and the devil, must be the heart and core of my existence. If people cannot see Christ in me at the local tavern, then I cannot go there. If people cannot see Christ in me at a party, then I cannot go there. If people cannot see Christ in me at the place I work, I cannot work there. For, you see, I am united with Christ. I am, by faith - to use Luther's expression - one cake with Christ. I am married to Christ, and Christ to me - forever! That means joy forever, come what may.

Once you have found the Savior, all the pleasures of life sink into their proper perspective - and you know what joy is. Every "ordinary" minute grows thrilling in its adventure. You young people have heard how falling in love changes things. Maybe you know that from personal experience. Well, falling in love with Jesus Christ is not different. It is even more of an adventure. Once you know Him as yours, every tree seems to be singing a psalm to Him - every pup with wagging tail seems happy because Christ lives - and every waterfall seems to want to burble its joy because Christ has become yours. The brook, the rains, everything speaks - sings - of Him who is altogether lovely, the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys. All things have become new for me, cried Paul.

Temptations which once dragged you down now become easy to master, You don't need drink. You don't even need food. You can take them or leave them. You have this one Treasure - and around that Treasure, Christ, you arrange your whole life. Everything falls into place. The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me! And so it is that whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do - we do it all to the glory of God and to our eternal Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Amen.