

1 Peter 5:8 – “Be Sober and watch”

Once I had asked a priest how he was doing. I expected the typical answer, “I’m ok” or “I’m well, thank you, how are you.” Instead he said to me, “I’m staying sober.” He did not mean that he was a drunk but that he was spiritually staying sober, he was awake and ready to follow God’s will. The verse from Saint Peter above can relate to both spiritual sobriety as well as physically sobriety. The soul animates the body, but what we do to our body can drastically effect the soul and in the case of drunkenness paralyze the soul.

A friend once shared this quote with me, “The problem with the alcoholic and the puritan is that the focus is too much on the drink, for the alcoholic the drink is a “god”, for the puritan it is all evil, the ‘devil’”.

We have to remember that alcohol in itself is not intrinsically evil, as the puritan would believe. Alcohol in fact is very Catholic and wholesome.

“He who drinks beer sleeps well. He who sleeps well cannot sin. He who does not sin goes to heaven. Amen.” Unknown monk

Here is a blessing of beer

Bless, O Lord, this creature beer, that Thou hast been pleased to bring forth from the sweetness of the grain: that it might be a salutary remedy for the human race: and grant by the invocation of Thy holy name, that, whosoever drinks of it may obtain health of body and a sure safeguard for the soul. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In this prayer of the Church, the Church calls beer what it is a creature. When man worships the creature rather than the creator, the creature has become a “god”.

Saint Arnold of Soissons is often cited as the patron saint of hop-pickers and Belgian brewers. Arnold lived from 1040 to 1087. Born in Oudenaarde, Flanders, he was first a career soldier (Arnulph the Strong of Oudenaarde), before settling at the Benedictine monastery of Soissons, France. He spent his first three years as a hermit, but later rose to be abbot of the monastery. He then became a priest and finally a bishop, another honor that he sought to avoid. When his see was occupied by another bishop, rather than fighting, he took the opportunity to retire from public life, founding the Abbey of St. Peter in Oudenburg.

At the abbey, he began to brew beer, as essential in medieval life as water. He encouraged local peasants to drink beer, instead of water, due to its "gift of health." During the process of brewing, the water was boiled and thus, unknown to all, freed of pathogens. This same story is also told of Arnulf or Arnold of Metz, another patron of brewers. There are many depictions of St. Arnold with a mashing rake in his hand, to identify him. He is honored in July with a parade in Brussels on the "Day of Beer."

Monks, many Benedictines, perfected beer. Beer was safer to drink than water, not only for the monks but also for the towns people. Although they brewed and drank beer, monks were adamantly against drunkenness, the rule of Saint Benedict states that a monk should be “not a wine bibber” or habitual drinker.

As for wine, the Catholic Church also perfected this alcoholic beverage. Wine was necessary for the celebration of the Catholic Mass, and so assuring a supply was crucial. The Benedictine monks became one of the largest producers of wine in France and Germany, followed closely by the Cistercians. Other orders, such as the Carthusians, the Templars, and the Carmelites, are also notable both historically and in modern times as wine producers. The Benedictines owned vineyards in Champagne (Dom Perignon was a Benedictine monk), Burgundy, and Bordeaux in France and in the Rheingau and Franconia in Germany.

Catholics perfected beer and wine, drank beer and wine, promoted and even blessed the drinking of beer and wine. Catholic also teach that everything must be done in moderation. Good things can be misused and drunkenness is the misuse of beer and wine. For a Catholic beer and wine are just that beer and wine, simply a drink, they are not a “god” and they are not the “devil”.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states in section 2290 states, “The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco, or medicine. Those incur grave guilt who, by drunkenness or a love of speed, endanger their own and others’ safety on the road, at sea, or in the air.” Drunkenness is a grave sin a serious matter, even causing death.

The Penny Catechism states section 361, “As to my eating, drinking, sleeping, and amusements, I should use all these things with moderation, and with a desire to please God. Think of the party you may attend and the eating, drinking and amusements that will be present and ask two questions: 1. Are the activities at the party done in moderation? 2. Are the activities at the part pleasing to God? If the answer to either is NO, then your body and soul should have no part in the party.

The following except is from Fr. Leonard Goffine’s, “The Church Year”.

Sobriety is the mother of vigilance; intemperance is the mother of sloth and of numberless other vices which cast many souls into the jaws of the devil who, like a hungry lion, goes about day and night seeking for prey. Woe, therefore, to those who because of their drunkenness live, as it were, in constant night and in the perpetual sleep of sin! How will they feel when, suddenly awakened by death, they find themselves before the judgment-seat of God burdened with innumerable sins of which they were unconscious, or of which they wished not to know they were guilty! Who can number the sins committed in a state of intoxication, sins for which the drunkard cares nothing, for which he has no contrition, and has not confessed, because the light of reason is extinguished, his life is a senseless stupor, and he is therefore unconscious of his thoughts, words and actions.

But will the divine Judge find no sin in such persons? Will He permit the shameful deeds committed while intoxicated, the curses, blasphemies, sneers, detractions, outrages, and scandals to remain unpunished? He who demands an account of every idle work, will he demand no account of the time so badly spent, of the money so uselessly squandered, families neglected, church service unattended, education of children omitted, and the other great sins committed? They will indeed excuse themselves, pleading that these sins were committed involuntarily, or as a joke, when they were intoxicated; that their intoxication was excusable, as they were not able to stand much; but will God be content with such excuses? Will they not add to their damnation? That they took more than they could bear of the intoxicating drink, deprived themselves of the use of reason, and thus voluntarily caused all the sins they committed while in that state, is what will be punished.

What then can they expect? Nothing less than the fate of the rich man spoken of in the gospel, who on account of his debaucheries was buried in hell, where during all eternity his parched tongue was not cooled by one drop of water (Lk. 16:22). Yes, this will be the place to those unconverted drunkards of whom St. Paul says that they will not possess the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:10). How rare and how difficult is the conversion of a drunkard, because with him as with the unchaste this habit becomes a second nature, and because he generally abuses the remedies: the holy Sacraments of Penance and the Altar.

This should certainly deter any one from the vice of drunkenness; but those who are not thus withheld, may consider the indecency, the disgrace, and the injury of this vice, for it ruins the body as well as the soul.

Is it not disgraceful that man endowed with reason, and created for heaven, should drown that reason in excessive drink, degrading his mind, his intellectual spirit, the image of God, rendering it like the brute animals, and even lower than the beasts. "Are not the drunkards far worse than the animals?" says St. Chrysostom. Yes, not only on account of their drunkenness, but far more so because of the shameful position of their body, their manners, their speech, their behavior. How disgracefully naked lay Noah, although he was intoxicated not through his own fault, exposed in his tent to the ridicule of the impudent Cham! (Gen. 9:21). Even the heathen Spartans considered the vice of drunkenness so disgraceful that they were in the habit of intoxicating a slave, and bringing him before their children that they might be disgusted with such a state.

Finally, that which should deter everybody from this vice is its injuriousness. It ruins the body as well as the soul. By surfeiting many have perished (Ecclus. 37:34), and it has ruined the health of many more. Who hath woe? Whose father hath woe? Who hath contentions? Who fall into pits, who have wounds without cause? Who have redness of eyes? Surely they that pass their time in wine, and study to drink off their cups? (Prov. 23:29-30). Daily observation confirms this truth of Scripture, and the miserable old age, accompanied by innumerable weakness and frailties of one addicted to drink is sufficient testimony of the injuriousness of this vice.

Create catholic culture by enjoying and knowing the Catholic history of alcohol, but most importantly create catholic culture by practicing the great virtue of temperance of moderation and NEVER choosing to get drunk. Drunkenness is never an option for the Catholic. It is a grave sin. Create catholic culture by also obeying the laws of your country, state or city...it has always been the practice to obey authority if the government says that you cannot drink in public until the age of 18, they we have obedience to that law without hesitation.