

## Temperance: the Human Maturity of Blessed Chaminade

*Not that I say this because of need, for I have learned, in whatever situation I find myself, to be self-sufficient. I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things, I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me. (St. Paul in the Letter to the Philippians, chapter 4, vv. 11-13)*

The virtue of temperance consists in mastering with reason and will the most instinctive impulses and desires of man. In this sense, temperance is a powerful weapon to combat natural impulses in the areas of food (gluttony), sexuality (lust), money (greed), intransigent self-affirmation (pride) and violent expression of one's own thoughts, criteria and words (anger), sensuality, love of comfort and irresponsibility in one's own work and obligations (laziness) and a depreciated vision of oneself that makes us hate the lives of other people with whom we live. We think that the latter possess what has not been given or acknowledged to me (envy). In this sense, temperance is a healing and harmonizing virtue of our personality.

*Blessed Chaminade was a temperate man, in possession of an admirable self-control.* Among his acquaintances circulated the fame "of his austerity" and the unalterable serenity of his face. However, we know that Chaminade was of a bilious and irritable character; but by controlling his character he managed to acquire a perfect self-control. All who knew him point out that the dignity of his person and his outward bearing stemmed from his purpose to imitate the modesty of Jesus Christ and from his state of continual prayer. For this reason, he recommended to people who sought his spiritual direction to strive by asceticism to work at the abnegation of one's own self, of acquired obsessions and vices, in order to be able – free from these human weaknesses – to practice prayer and find the loving will of God in all things.

All those who knew him confirm that the *sobriety of the priest Chaminade at mealtimes* was great. In the morning he had a slice of bread for breakfast with wine, water and seasonal fruit; in the evening a hot dish and dessert; no meat. His maid, María Dubour, who had been in his service since the time of the

Revolution, prepared a bottle of coffee for the week. It was only in the last years of his life that he allowed himself some differences in his diet, necessitated by the ailments of age: "If I no longer go down to take my meals with the community, it is because of the harshness of the [winter] season and a slight difference in the diet required by my infirmities," he wrote to Father Caillet on January 16, 1846.



**View of the multitude of pilgrims present in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City, on September 3, 2000, at the beatifications of Popes Pius IX and John XXIII, Bishop Tommaso Reggio, Abbot Dom Columba Marmion and Father Chaminade.**

The priest Chaminade had become accustomed to frugality during the clandestine period of the Revolutionary Terror. Then, during the three years of exile in Zaragoza he lived in great poverty, having to do artisanal work to live. Despite his personal austerity, he taught that "external penance must be regulated not only by bodily strength, but by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit [...]"

and this is ensured in prayer, obedience and union with the penitent Sacred Heart of Jesus."

*His strength in austerity and penance was formidable.* At the age of 65, prolonged work until ten o'clock at night did not seem to him to be a sufficient reason to break the Lenten fast and have a bite to eat before going to bed. *His capacity for work and concentration was incredible.* He worked until late at night to respond to correspondence and write his multiple reports, circulars, regulations. For the Cause of beatification, 1,525 letters were catalogued, in seven volumes; in addition to the 73 circulars to Marianist men and women religious, drafts of Constitutions and regulations, notebooks of homilies and conferences, reports to the bishops and the Nuncio, ...; to Mother Adele de Batz he writes: "I have long since deprived myself of reading the newspapers; I am aware of only what I need to know" (March 11, 1818).

It is true that *nature endowed him with a robust physical constitution. He made no distinction between cold and heat,* always wearing the same cassock, worn but clean; he never wore a coat, nor was there a fireplace or brazier in his room, even when it was very cold. Every winter he caught a bad cold; in spite of this, on visits to the communities of Alsace and Franche-Comté he did not consent to a stove being installed in his room. At Courtefontaine he refused a second blanket to wrap his feet in for the night, saying, "Let us save this care for when we are old," and he was seventy-four years old!

*Only one habit displeased him about himself, that he snorted snuff;* it seems that he had been advised by the doctor to combat winter colds. Another habit due to his usual annual colds was to carry a cauterizer during the winter months to sterilize the ulcers caused by the mucus in his nose.

In spite of these physical weaknesses, he had reached a *complete detachment from the things of the earth,* as he manifested to Bro. Louis Rothéa. "As for my personal tastes, I find very few in myself, if there are still any. All the rooms on earth, the most beautiful and the most comfortable, seem to me to be places of exile." In fact, being "condescending to others, he was himself, sober, an enemy of all sensuality. *He practiced frequent vigils and fasts. But everything was measured and calculated: in his mannerisms, his walk, gestures, composure,*

*words*. Being very old he walked very slowly because his toenails were digging into his flesh; but in order to do penance he did not cure himself of it.

The priest Chaminade possessed a *great command of himself to contain his emotions; so much so that he had a reputation for being impassive*. They say that when he heard the news of the fire in the community house in Marast, he did not issue any complaint; on the contrary, he exclaimed: "It is necessary to serve the good God better; to serve him as he wants to be served." Father José Fabriès says that he never saw him laugh out loud, or even laugh; But he always had the same smiling expression on his face, "such was the calmness of a soul always master of itself." In his relations with his neighbor *he was never irritated, his language was measured*, so as not to mortify anyone.

How did *Blessed Chaminade conceive asceticism?* In a letter to Bro. Dominic Clouzet he writes that "mortification must be extended to all the acts of our life; it must be continuous and in everything." To Bro. Claude Mouchet he writes: "Mortification must consist essentially in not following any inclination of corrupt nature. Since Providence has imposed certain inclinations on us, do not let yourself be carried away by them, even if they are of nature and God has ordained it, such as eating, drinking, sleeping... He should mortify them by depriving himself of what is excessive or disorderly and sanctify them by keeping himself engaged in good thoughts while practicing them."

Finally, in possession of a strong will and practicing mortification in everything, the *priest Chaminade taught his religious to be ascetic*: To Bro. Dominic Clouzet he wrote: "The more business you have, the greater is the need that you must possess yourself; the more you have need of the threefold interior silence that I recommend so much to everyone; that is, of the imagination, of the mind and of the passions" (January 28, 1828). To the great community of Saint Remy, he taught that "to observe the five silences is to be already very advanced in perfection."

For this reason, when he preached retreats, Blessed Chaminade explained the necessity for personal spiritual life and the advantages for the religious community of practicing self-denial in prayer, in corporal penances imposed by the Constitutions or chosen voluntarily, abstinence on days of fasting, mortification of self-love, pride, vanity, etc. self-denial in work and in the

apostolate, the separation from the world, necessary to move away from a worldly life and to be able to practice discernment for the benefit of the spiritual life and the apostolate.

**All quotations in this article are taken from the testimonies of witnesses during the beatification and canonization process of the Servant of God William Joseph Chaminade and compiled in the *Positio super virtutibus*, Rome, 1929. See the book by Antonio Gascón, *Chaminade, un hombre de Dios. Retrato espiritual*, Madrid, SPM, 2021, pp. 67-73, in the Digital Library of the Marianist Family of Spain:**

<https://biblioteca.familiamarianista.es>