Faith Formation Files: Vol. 2, Issue 11 December 8, 2019

When Kory and I were planning our wedding, I asked my friend, Sue\*, to be one of my bridesmaids. Sue had been a friend of mine for years. I had been in her wedding. I wanted Sue to be in my bridal party because she represented a part of my life, my college days. She was funny and caring, and Kory and I had a great relationship with her and her husband. Sue was thrilled to be asked and to my joy, she accepted. But as so many of us often do, we make events like this into a reason to “improve” ourselves.

Sue very quickly began a strict diet. It wasn’t necessary for my benefit, but if it helped Sue feel better about herself then I was supportive of her efforts. Sue started a low-carb lifestyle. And when I say low, I mean it was really a NO carb diet. She didn’t allow herself any creamer in her coffee. She quit using condiments like ketchup or BBQ sauce. Sue lived on burgers, pork chops, scrambled eggs, and bacon. She refused to give herself “cheat days” and she NEVER consumed more than 20 grams of carbs per day. (A normal daily allowance of carbs is 225-325 grams/day.) I honestly don’t know where her self-control came from. And not only did she essentially quit eating carbohydrates, she began to work-out, too. She jumped on her elliptical machine every chance she got. Some days she’d rack up hours on that thing! Now I’m not saying this was the healthiest way to lose weight/get in shape, but in five months she dropped 60+ pounds and went down four dress sizes! Sue acquired some very stringent habits for herself that resulted in changes for which she was very happy. Sue has relaxed a little since then. She still limits her daily carb intake but allows up to 100 grams each day. She gives herself one “cheat weekend” per month, plus all holidays are “cheat” days. While her elliptical still holds a commanding presence in her living room, sometimes it now serves as a coat rack instead. But it was through Sue’s great desire to want to change her physical appearance that she developed and held herself to these new eating and exercise habits. Now, her drinking her coffee black and ordering her Wendy’s single without the bun is just a given. Neither she nor any of her family or friends even sees it as that big of a deal anymore. That’s just how Sue eats now. We could almost call Sue’s dieting a virtue.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines virtue as “an habitual and firm disposition to do the good…” (CCC, 1803) Her lifestyle changes were certainly both “habitual” and “firm” and she was doing it for her physical good. We should all strive to be so devoted to developing virtues in our own lives. The Cardinal Virtues govern our moral choices. They are acquired by human effort and perfected by grace. The virtues are prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. If you picked just one of these to work on during Advent, this period of hope and anticipation, just think how quickly it could become habitual. Consider the first virtue, prudence. Prudence involves using reason to do good and in the best way possible. How could you improve yourself if you started to be a little more cautious with your driving or your financial affairs? Could you do more good for others if you showed a bit more self-discretion or employed some foresight? What about virtue two, justice? This virtue demands that we “give their due to God and neighbor.” (CCC, 1807) All things come from God. We are called to be managers of God’s resources and gifts. 1 Peter 4:10 says, “Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these varied graces of God, put it at the service of others.” And Proverbs 3:27 tells us, “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so.” Are you sharing your talents and gifts? How are you caring for your fellow man? The next virtue is temperance. This entails showing moderation in your life. Have you (or are you hoping to) go overboard in your Christmas gift giving? Do you limit yourself in regards to delicious foods, sweets, or alcohol? Set limits for yourself and adhere to them! Finally, let’s consider fortitude. You show fortitude when you persevere and when you show both mental and emotional strength in facing temptation or difficulty. What are your vices? Do you control them or are they in control of you? What about that one relative who you’re bound to see at the family Christmas party? How will you interact with him or her? I plan to focus on one of these virtues and develop it into a habit. My changes might not have any effect on the scales, but if I am as strict with myself as Sue was, I bet I would lose some of the weight of sin that hangs on me. How much do you think Satan weighs?

Join us at Faith Formation every Sunday in Fellowship Hall from noon- 2 pm as we learn more about our faith and how to live it in today’s world. All are welcome!

 Blessings,

 Julie Gould

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