

- The great mendicant, St. Dominic, once said that “A man who governs his passions is master of the world. We must either command them, or be commanded by them. It is better to be a hammer than an anvil.”
- When it comes to the spiritual life, our passions are the intensely powerful feelings or desires that lead us into sin, particularly the capital sins of lust, anger, greed, and envy.
- When we give free reign to our passions, we fall prey to concupiscence, hedonism, unbridled pleasure-seeking, and in the worst cases, hatred.
- Thus, St. Dominic’s point is well taken, for all of us from time to time have felt the turbulent waves of sinful inclinations rise and crash within ourselves.
- Sometimes it can feel like our passions – particularly those that inflame our lower appetites – are tyrants that must be obeyed. Emotions, especially when they are strong, can lead us to say and do all sorts of things that we know are wrong and sinful.
- Thus, it is so very important that every man of God learn how to govern his passions so as not to be a slave to them, for it is not God’s will that we be at the mercy of our emotions and passions, but rather that we learn self-control and restraint so that we may protect ourselves from sin.
- Truly, my friends, in our day and age, I cannot stress enough to you how important it is to guard ourselves from sin. Sin not only distorts and perverts our true selves, but it offends God. Moreover, as St. Paul wrote to the Romans, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23).
- Thus, as true followers of Christ, we must be willing to endure all types of suffering and punishments rather than commit sin, for the sufferings of this world are only temporary, but the suffering that we will have to endure for our un-repentant mortal sins is eternal.
- There is a hell, my friends, and it would do us good to try to avoid it! This requires that we fight. While God’s grace is constantly trying to pull upward, our passions and sinful inclinations drag us downward, and thus we must be vigilant in fighting these passions.
- Our second reading from the Letter of St. James talks about what falling prey to our sinful passions can do to us, while the first reading from the Book of Wisdom gives us an example of how sin can harden our hearts and blind us to truth and goodness.
- St. James tells us that “where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice.” He then asks: “Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?”
- The point St. James is making is that if we fail to fight against our sinful passions and inclinations, we will lose our inner peace, making us vulnerable to falling even deeper into sin.
- Rather than sating our desires, giving in to our passions, my friends, simply inflames them all the more. And when the sins we commit are mortal, it robs us of our interior peace because our Lord, Who entered our souls at baptism, flees from us until we make a good confession and are absolved from our sins.
- Further, the more we give into our sinful passions and inclinations, the less able we are to see the Truth and act in accord with it. Sin hardens our hearts, and if we fail to fight the sin in our life, our hearts will harden to the point that we begin to hate that which is good and holy.
- We see a very clear example of this in the first reading from the Book of Wisdom. This reading tells the story of wicked men who wish to cause suffering to a just man. While this

passage is often understood to be a prophecy of Jesus' passion and death, it shows us clearly how sin can devastate us morally.

- The wicked men mentioned in this passage want to harm the just man *because* he is just. They know of his innocence and goodness, but their sins have hardened their hearts to such a degree that the just man's very presence is a reproach to them.
- While it is a very normal human feeling not to like some people, if we actually hate another person and wish them harm, then there is something seriously wrong with us, namely, that we have given in to our sinful passions to such a degree that we are now mastered by them.
- The good news is that it is never God's will that we persist in our sinfulness. As the Divine Physician, He is capable of healing us and restoring us to full spiritual health. But in order for this to happen, we must align our wills with His most holy will.
- Last week I mentioned that if we suffer from a weak will, we can strengthen our wills through fasting and penances. Every time we choose, out of love for God, to voluntarily deny ourselves something we desire, our wills grow stronger, rendering us more capable of saying no to our passions and sinful desires as they arise.
- But there is an even more fundamental step we must take first if we truly wish to strengthen our wills and protect ourselves from sin, and this we read about in today's Gospel. It is this: we must learn to be humble and charitable.
- In the Gospel today Jesus says to the 12 apostles: "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." Then taking a child and embracing him, Jesus tells the 12 that they must be ready to receive such a child in His name.
- In these words and actions of Jesus, we see these two virtues humility and charity extolled.
- St. John Vianney once said that: "Humility is to the various virtues what the chain is in a rosary. Take away the chain and the beads are scattered; remove humility, and all virtues vanish."
- Thus, humility is the root of every other virtue. Humility nourishes our soul and makes us capable of receiving God's grace so that the virtues can take root and grow in our souls.
- Moreover, humility helps us to see how truly weak we are, and thus it induces us to seek our Lord's strength and protection all the more when we're bombarded by temptation.
- Charity, on the other hand, is the form of all the virtues. Whereas humility prepares us to receive the other virtues, charity helps to perfect the other virtues within us.
- Because charity is the most important and most powerful of all virtues, the more we grow in charity, the more the other virtues naturally grow within us as well, including the virtues of temperance, chastity, and meekness, which help us to control our passions.
- The more we grow in humility, the more we see God and ourselves as we truly are. The more we grow in charity, the more we love God for Who He Is. The more that we know God and love God, the more we want to serve Him and avoid offending Him.
- My dear friends, let us learn to turn away from sin by strengthening ourselves against our passions and sinful inclinations through growing in the virtues of humility and charity.
- Let us avoid sin at all cost, not only because sin has the power to distort and destroy our souls, but also out of our love for God, Whom we should love above all things.