

Dear Saints,

If you have been paying attention over the last few months, you know that I have been convicted a lot lately. First, and for some time, I have been convicted about not being in the Word of God enough. The more time we spend in the Word of God, the better we will live in Christ, pastor and layman alike. Second, I have been convicted that I need to preach more effectively. How to preach better will always be on my mind however long God allows me this privilege. Third, I have been convicted about being out of shape. Quite bluntly, there should not be overweight, out-of-shape pastors. In an attempt to lose weight and get in shape, I have joined Warzone Boxing Club in downtown Rialto. I have been attending at least twice a week for a month as I write this. I absolutely love it. You may ask yourself, "Why has my pastor joined a boxing club? Boxing? Really?"

Boxing is a sport that goes back to ancient Greece. All young men would learn it along with wrestling and other Olympic arts and philosophy. They were then prepared to serve the city in either war or peacetime. Boxing, since the start of our country, has been a way for poorer classes to achieve financial independence. At its best, it is a beautiful sport. Manny Pacquiao is a great example of a professional boxer who is a passionate Christian and devoted servant to his country. It is not without its problems. There have been many notorious boxers, but perhaps the best known to all of us is Mike Tyson. There is no doubt that Mike Tyson is a great boxer, but there is also no doubt that Mr. Tyson has embodied some of the worst depravities of man. Boxing allowed him to hurt a lot of people including himself. I believe the abuse of something good does not make the good thing bad. I am not taking a boxing fitness class, but I am actually learning the art of boxing and getting in shape at the same time. I believe there are great arguments for and against boxing by thoughtful, knowledgeable Christians. After prayerful consideration, I believe that I can participate in boxing with a clear conscience.

This got me thinking about the nature of our existence. You are a physical creature. And you are a spiritual creature. God "*formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*" (Genesis 2:7) You and I are both physical and spiritual. That is, you are body and soul. And since God created both your body and soul, you should care about your body and soul. Being good Lutherans, you know that you are condemned in your flesh, body and soul. You also know that you are redeemed in your new man, body and soul. St. Paul puts it this way, "What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable." (1 Corinthians 15:42) Now it is certainly true that you cannot redeem your old man. He must be drowned in the waters of Holy Baptism. (Romans 6) We do not negotiate with the old man. We drown him or her! Yet, we should care about our life now. The newness of life that Paul talks about in Romans 6 applies to you today. In other words, you should care about your physical body.

Paul says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) Paul is talking primarily about sexual immorality. But being chaste is not the only way we can glorify God in our bodies. Consequently, we should strive to keep our bodies in a state of relative fitness so that we confess Christ and serve our neighbor in love as well as we can. At the same time, we understand that our bodies will fail.

We must all pass through death which is the completion of our Baptism. We balance pursuing relative fitness with the reality that death will come, unless our Lord comes back first.

Also, I do not want to imply that your physical state is a reflection of your spiritual state. There is an unfair stigma against people who are overweight; that they are gluttonous and have no self-control. This is simply not true. The rise of obesity in America matches the general availability of sugar and processed foods. On top of that, if you follow the governmental guidelines for diet, you will gain weight and become unhealthy (according to many reputable studies). Furthermore, some health conditions and medicines cause you to gain weight. Your spiritual condition is really related to the state of our conscience. Many psychological problems are due to bad consciences and that is the one thing psychologists do not treat! A bad conscience is the Holy Spirit working on you. And the only cure for a bad conscience is Holy Absolution. Corporate Confession & Absolution on Sunday morning is great, but private Confession & Absolution is even better! You can have a clean conscience regardless of what physical shape your in!

So, what can, and should, we do? I believe there are three things that are imperative for all of us to do.

First, we need to eat well which means eating more natural food and less food than you think you need. The more natural food that we can eat, the more well fueled are bodies are. There are a ton of dietary approaches you can use. Pick one that is sustainable for a lifetime. Second, we need to move. Physical fitness really boils down to finding something you like to do and doing it. Just find some way to move! I really like external motivation which is the primary reason I joined the boxing club. The buddy system is really helpful as well. Find a friend to do something with! Third, and finally, fasting and feasting has been the pattern of eating since the creation. The church year is really built around a fasting (Advent and Lent) and feasting (Christmas and Easter) schedule. We typically feast way too much and never fast. It would serve your body well to feast less and incorporate intermittent and extended fasting into your life. Practically this looks like no snacks, only two or three meals a day where your eating window is significantly less than your feeding window and occasionally, like during Advent or Lent, skipping a meal. And remember that consistency beats intensity every time. Just doing a little every day will have a massive impact in the long run. It is just the same with your daily devotions and anything else in life, really.

Ultimately, this will allow you to be a more effective confessor of Christ and more able to serve your neighbor in love. St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, is a great example of this. Through persistent prayer and devotion, she won over both St. Augustine and his dad to the faith. She is one of my favorite saints and a great example for all of us. And ultimately, we will join St. Monica and St. Augustine and his dad in our eternal rest with our Lord and Savior, Jesus. We are perishable seed now, but God will raise us up as imperishable seed! God be praised!

In Christ,
Pastor Maggard