

Temperance (Self-Control)

It has been a week since the beginning of the new term. I hope that by now you have already established your learning routine. You should revise and make notes of what you have learnt every day, and prepare your next day's lessons. It is important that you start putting in place all your learning habits now as there are only 15 weeks left before the Christmas holiday and your mid-year examination. Do not take too long to warm up, because a week passes by very quickly and before you know it, your mid-year examination will be staring right at you. For the students in Form 6, of course, your DSE examination is literally just round the corner.

With the resumption of the normal timetable, we now begin each new day with a morning assembly, every day except Tuesday. Our assembly is more than just a regular meeting of students and teachers for notices or announcements, as for many schools in Hong Kong. Morning assembly has a special meaning in St. Paul's College because we regard it as a worship service. It is an opportunity for us as a community to focus on God before we begin our day. We thank God for all the good gifts that He has given us and at the same time we bring before Him our prayers for strength to deal with the challenges that come our way. Hymn singing, Bible reading, prayer, and a blessing are therefore the most important components of our assembly. That is why we ask you to bring your hymn books so that you can participate fully in the assembly as part of the SPC community.

I can assure you that if we focus our attention on God first, we will be able to put our worries, concerns and challenges into perspective. If we learn to appreciate all the good things that God has already given us, we will find the strength to overcome the obstacles that God has also put before us.

Our series of assembly follows a particular theme every week and there is also a corresponding bible verse that comes with it. The theme of this week is "self-control" which is taken from Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." These are the nine visible attributes of a true Christian life. We are going to focus on a number of these virtues in the

following weeks but our focus this week is on “self-control”. We are happy to have Fr Robert, our former Chaplain, and Mr. Louis Pong, our Supervisor, coming to speak to us on Wednesday and Thursday. We will not have any assembly this Friday because it is our Swimming Gala and we will meet at the Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park swimming pool.

In our Bible reading today, the Apostle Paul describes life as a race and all who run the race, should run to win. While the crown that the Apostle Paul wants to win may be different from yours, the point is that you need to live a life with purpose. The purpose may vary as you mature and as you gain more knowledge, but it has to be pursued wholeheartedly. The Apostle Paul uses the analogy of an athlete taking part in a race. No athletes go into a race with only a half-hearted effort, rather, they give it their all. To achieve that, it takes a lot of discipline or self-control.

Anyone who has seen the rigorous regime that athletes have to go through in their training will understand the importance of self-control/discipline and what it means by making sacrifices for something greater. The Apostle Paul here said that he would discipline his body so that it would not master him. I am sure you have heard of the expression “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

There are indeed many areas in our lives that may bring negative effects to us if they are uncontrolled. Shakespeare wrote many plays about these human frailties. The story of “Macbeth” is about the downfall of a great Scottish general who murdered his King and his good friend because of his lust for power. “Othello” is the tragedy of a Moorish general who was overpowered by his jealousy and killed his own wife, Desdemona. Likewise, newspapers are full of stories of crimes committed by people who have either lost control of their emotions such as anger and jealousy or have succumbed to their desires for things such as money, sex or alcohol. Anger, jealousy, discord, greed, lust, gluttony, binge drinking, the list just goes on and on; these vices are the result of people losing control of themselves.

What do you think is the hardest to control? In James 3:7-8 we are told: “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” From

our mouth can come words of encouragement, comfort and assurance. However, from the same mouth can come curses, rumours, hatred and abuse. Our words can build people up but equally our words can tear people down. An unbridled tongue can do a lot of damage.

Self-control or temperance is, of course, the ability to control oneself. It involves moderation, constraint, and the ability to say “no” to our baser desires. “Self-control” is called the fruit of the Spirit because it is not something that we can do all on our own. It is only through allowing God to work through us that we gradually develop the ability to control our thoughts, our words and our actions.

The Bible reminds us that we will learn to lead a life of self-control if we allow God to be in our hearts, if we submit our thoughts and desires to God. Essentially, we need to fill our minds with good and godly things, or else, we can never rise above our base desires. For it is written in Proverbs 4:23: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

Dennis D.Y. Yuen