

Preparation for Lent

Forty Days with Your Temperament

By Laraine Bennett

Lent begins dramatically when the priest pronounces as we receive the ashes, “Remember, man, that you are dust. And unto dust you shall return.” During Lent we reflect on the frailty of human existence, our mortality, and our need for mercy as we journey through this “vale of tears.” We unite ourselves to the mystery of Jesus as He fasted and prayed and freely submitted to temptation in the desert. Through self-denial, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimages, retreats and other Lenten sacrifices, we hope to detach ourselves from anything that prevents us from loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (cf. Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:30). Yet even as we journey on the road of detachment, we bring along with us some baggage: an inclination to sin, our own disordered desires, and the frailty of our temperament.

What is Temperament?

Temperament is God’s gift to us to “kick-start” our personalities; it is a part (not the whole) of our personality, that part we

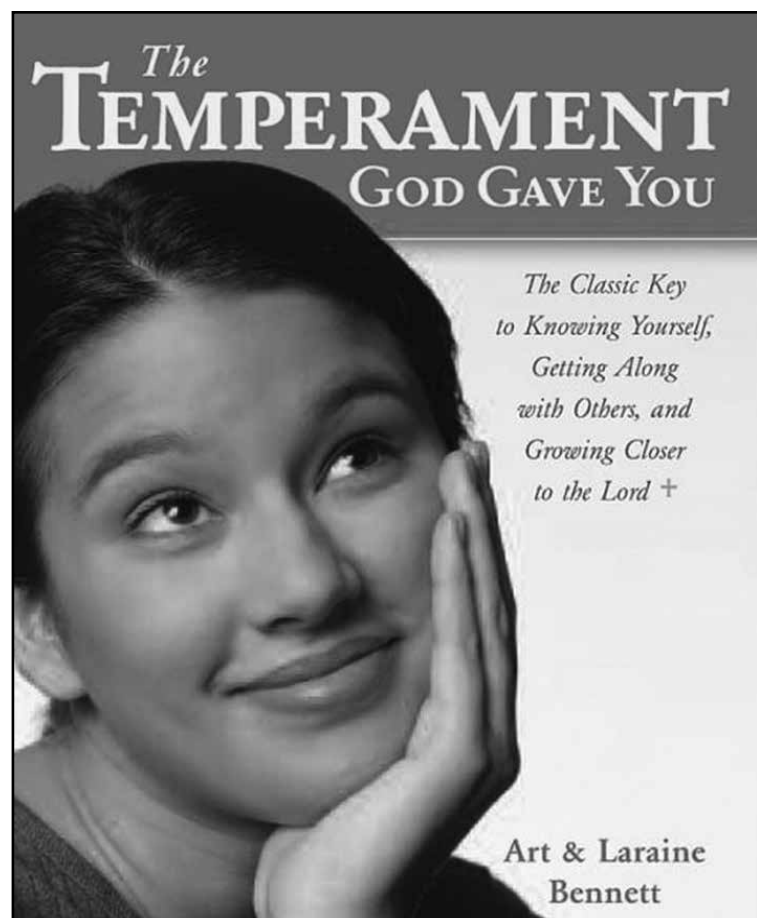
are born with. Specifically, it is the *tendency to react* in a certain way deriving from the “physiological constitution of individuals.”¹

Temperamental characteristics include how quickly or slowly we tend to react, the intensity of our reactions, our sociability, perseverance and so on. In addition to temperament, our personalities are also shaped by environmental factors such as our culture, our family of origin, our education, and so on. Nonetheless, when speaking of temperament, we are referring to those aspects of our personalities innate in us, due to our *nature*. As St. Thomas Aquinas famously said, grace never destroys nature but builds on it. And we know that we are always fundamentally free to respond to God’s grace and to grow in holiness; our temperament never prescribes our responses. When we are aware of the ways our temperament inclines us to react, we are forewarned, so to speak, and can choose to respond in the most prudent way possible, rather than in a “knee-jerk” fashion.

It is important to note that our temperamental

characteristics are not morally culpable; for example, one child may tend to impulsivity through temperament and another may have a tendency to be argumentative; another child may be prone to negativity and yet another to passivity. These tendencies are not in themselves sinful. As Fr. Conrad Hock wrote in his 1934 booklet *The Four Temperaments*, “Every temperament is in itself good.” Nonetheless, it can never be used as an excuse for bad behavior: “[M]an can and must cultivate and perfect the good elements of his temperament and combat and eradicate the evil ones.”²

Understanding temperament gives us an insight into what our natural strengths and weaknesses are – which virtues will come easily and which virtues will be more difficult; what might be stumbling blocks to motivation and what aspects of the spiritual life may be more challenging for each type. Most people are a blend of temperaments, which we thoroughly explore in our first book, *The Temperament God Gave You*,³ along with the



natural virtues, strengths and weaknesses, motivators and spiritual tendencies of each.

Let’s dive into the classic four temperaments: choleric, phlegmatic, sanguine and melancholic.

Choleric

The **choleric** is your original “type A”

personality. They have quick, intense, and long-lived reactions, so they tend to be decisive, tenacious, and driven to follow through. Determined, energetic, forceful and confident, they naturally gravitate to leadership positions. In fact, they simply love to be in charge! (They don’t need to have any *actual experience*

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Grief Mixed with Dread:

Benedict XVI’s Death and What Lies Ahead

By Anthony P. Stine, Ph.D.

With the death of Pope Benedict XVI on Dec. 31, 2022, the Catholic world was left with two main responses: the usual grief over the loss of a beloved Pope, which should be expected from the faithful, but also grief mixed with dread. The latter response came from traditionalists and conservatives who have a collective sense that something critical changed with Benedict’s passing. The near-unanimous opinion is that, with the passing of Benedict, the crisis in the Church will worsen, almost as if Benedict was acting as a restraining force on the Modernist agenda.

Death of a *Katechon*?

There is a sense among certain Catholics that Benedict XVI was in some way a restraining force on Pope Francis and the Modernists in his orbit. Some have likened this to the role of the *katechon* mentioned by St. Paul in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians (2:7). This claim is often repeated by so-called “Beneplenists” (those who believe that

Benedict’s resignation was invalid for various reasons, and thus, that Pope Francis is an antipope). It was also repeated by former Catholic Rod Dreher in a recent article for *The American Conservative* in which he analyzes Antonio Socci’s 2019 book, *The Secret of Benedict XVI: Is He Still Pope?*¹ Throughout his article, Mr. Dreher summarizes various interviews Benedict granted to Peter Seewald and others.²

In the book-length interview *Last Testament*, for example, Seewald broached the subject of “the prophecy of Malachy” (a prophetic list of future popes), noting that, “According to this list, the papacy ends after your [Benedict’s] Pontificate.” Seewald then asked Benedict, “Is that an issue for you, whether it can actually be that at least you are the last of a series of popes, as we have known the office so far?” To which Benedict replied, “Anything can be,” while also stating that “you don’t have to conclude that it [the papacy] really ceases” with the end of St. Malachy’s list, and further, that his list “was never going to be long enough.”³

A keen observer does not

need to hold any of the above-mentioned controversial theories in order to recognize that something changed in the Church and in the world with the death of Pope Benedict XVI. Numerous secular media outlets have noticed the change, as well, reporting on it quietly jubilant and noting that Benedict XVI is no longer “in the way of Pope Francis” and his efforts to “reform the Church.”⁴ *The New York Times* made this unsettling claim on January 7 (two days after Benedict’s funeral):

“Now, with the burial of Benedict on Thursday [Jan. 5, 2023], Francis, never bashful about exercising his power, is for the first time unbound. ‘Now, I’m sure he’ll take it over,’ said [Cardinal] Oswald Gracias, the archbishop of Mumbai, as he walked around St. Peter’s Square before Benedict’s funeral Mass. Some liberal supporters of Francis, who has often balked in the face of advancing major overhauls, are raising expectations for a late-breaking season of change. Many bishops



and Cardinals in the Vatican are convinced ‘he’s thinking ahead,’ said Gerard O’Connell, the Vatican correspondent for *America* magazine. ‘What changes now is that the opposition will not have the rallying figure, manipulating Benedict. Francis has a very clear agenda.’⁵

There seems to be a general consensus that Benedict was somehow in the way of Francis. But in the way of what, precisely? Benedict passed

away against the backdrop of the ongoing Synod on Synodality, which is openly investigating the question of creating a faux diaconate for women,⁶ giving laity greater authority in the Church, and normalizing or softening the Church’s teaching against sodomitical behavior and those who identify with those sins that cry out to Heaven for vengeance.⁷

The stage is set for radical changes by the end of the “synodal journey” (October 2024), and Modernists have

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Temperament

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in the situations over which they decide to take charge. And this doesn't undermine their confidence at all.) We can all think of certain political figures who perfectly exemplify this temperament. You will know if you have a choleric spouse or child, because they are the ones who are always debating everything you say. They can't pass up a good argument! St. Paul was very likely a choleric. In Athens, Paul grows exasperated by the all the idols: "So he debated in the synagogue with the Jews and the worshippers, and daily in the public square with whoever happened to be there." He even disagreed openly with St. Peter, the first Pope: "I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11). In the Book of Acts, it says about Paul that "spoke also to the Gentiles and disputed with the Greeks. But they sought to kill him" (Acts 9:27). Cholerics sometimes provoke that kind of response. It is sometimes said that they make great saints...or sinners!

Virtues that tend to be challenging include humility, patience, empathy and obedience. Cholerics are always tempted to follow their own will, to assume they are *always* right, and to be impatient with weaker or slower people. As Fr. Hock rather bluntly said, "The choleric prefers to die rather than to humble himself."⁴ Nonetheless,

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these are precisely the virtues cholerics need to attain. The strong will that Saul of Tarsus exhibited when persecuting the early Christians is the same strong will he exhibited after his conversion as the Apostle to the Gentiles; his strong will did not change, but he learned how to direct it properly in obedience to Our Lord.

Albino Luciani – perhaps better known as Pope John Paul I, who served as pope for only 33 days – wrote a "Letter to Hippocrates"⁵ in which he humorously illustrated the four different temperaments by putting each one to the same test: climbing the sheer face of a cliff. Upon facing a sheer cliff, the choleric would immediately pronounce: "Obstacles on this cliff? But obstacles are made for the express purpose of being overcome!"⁶ And then

he would attack it like his mortal enemy.

This is how the choleric attacks Lent, too. He firmly sets a goal and then ferociously charges up that cliff, whatever the Lenten sacrifice. In fact, he relishes the challenge of spiritual warfare: let us battle Satan, sin, and the flesh. *Hooah!* Because cholerics also like to succeed at whatever task they have undertaken, they are often practical about the Lenten sacrifices they choose. And if by chance they fail once or twice, they will not beat themselves up about it. But whatever the particular mortifications they choose, one thing should be at the forefront: to make time in their always busy schedules for meditation and contemplation. More Martha than Mary, they have a tendency towards activism, often priding themselves on their ability to accomplish many things. So, for the cholerics out there, in addition to your Lenten sacrifices, make sure you have scheduled time for quiet reflection, prayer, meditation and contemplation, ideally in the presence of Our Eucharistic Lord.

Phlegmatic

The exact opposite temperament to the choleric is the calm, even-tempered **phlegmatic**. They tend to react slowly and rarely with intensity, even in the middle of a

conflict. Phlegmatics are dependable, polite, and good-natured. As children, they are quiet, docile, and obedient. (This is why every family needs at least one!) Phlegmatics would rather take the blame (even unjustly) than stir up controversy or pick a fight. The key to the phlegmatic is that he is a peacemaker: he hates conflict, especially interpersonal conflict. The exact opposite of the choleric, who actually relishes a good argument, the phlegmatic hates arguments. Where the choleric loves to be in charge, the phlegmatic is extremely cooperative and prefers taking direction and being part of a team. A phlegmatic often says, "I don't care; whatever you want to do." They will happily be a hard-working member of the team; nonetheless, they can also become excellent leaders

once they are encouraged to do so.

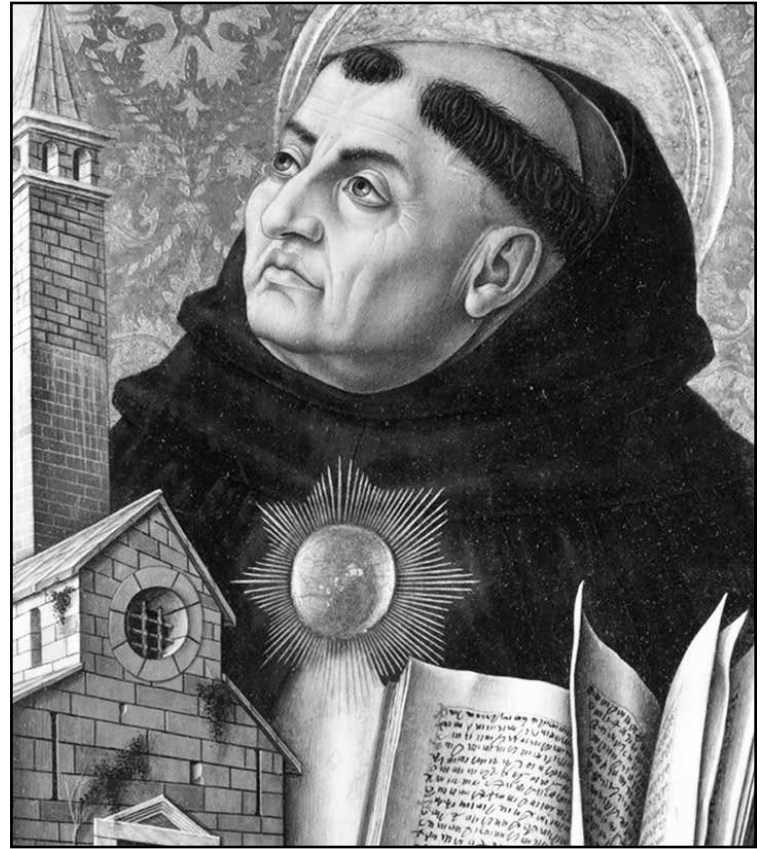
Virtues that might be more difficult and should be encouraged in phlegmatics include courage, leadership, and holy audacity. Phlegmatics are wonderful peacemakers, but there are times when they ought to speak up. The Cross for a phlegmatic may be speaking the truth in the face of hostility or taking charge of a situation. The brilliant St. Thomas Aquinas is thought to have been phlegmatic. As he methodically and carefully worked through every argument, he also always gave his opponent the best argument – even a better argument than they themselves had originally proffered.

In Albino Luciani's scenario, the phlegmatic will take a calm look at the cliff, calculate the angle of the ascent, take methodical notes on all the items he will need to procure and, after a good amount of time, slowly pronounce, "Maybe I'll make it!" Similarly, as our phlegmatic approaches Lent he may ponder what would be an appropriate Lenten sacrifice: not something too difficult or flashy or anything that would inconvenience others; perhaps something positive, rather than negative. He might weigh all the options so carefully that the first few weeks of Lent slip past before he has decided! But perhaps the best Lenten sacrifice for the phlegmatic will be to recall that before Christ entered His

Passion, He turned out the moneychangers from the temple, firmly declaring, "It is written: My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves" (Matt. 21:13). There are times that call for holy audacity, fortitude, and speaking the truth even though it may create some waves. "Peace and quiet" is not the same as the true peace which comes from Jesus Christ. Sometimes the phlegmatic needs to lean into conflict in order to achieve the true peace they seek. Instead of charting the safest, easiest course this Lent, phlegmatics can be encouraged to take on holy audacity and to "seek the things that are above" (Col. 3:1).

Sanguine

The **sanguine** is your classic "people person" –



St. Thomas Aquinas

sociable, fun-loving, and affectionate. They are eager to please and love to be the center of attention. They have quick, intense, but short-lived reactions and tend to live in the present moment. As a result, the sanguine temperament is talkative, optimistic, spontaneous and enthusiastic – but forgetful. They arrive late, forget their car keys, and even where they parked the car. But they always have a funny story about being late, so you forgive them! They are like butterflies that flit from flower to flower, from one interest to another. Your sanguine child is the one running out of the door for school and coming back three times because he forgot his homework, the permission slip he needed signed, or his sports equipment. None of this is intentionally bad behavior; sanguines simply need a lot of reminders and coaching in perseverance.

St. Peter likely was a loveable (but inconstant) sanguine. "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death" (Luke 22:33), he fervently pronounces, but just a few hours later he denies even knowing Jesus! At the transfiguration, Peter enthusiastically offers to set up three tents on the spot – even though, as Scripture notes, "he did not know what he was saying" (Luke 9:33). When Christ appears walking on the water, Peter impulsively joins him – until he begins to sink (cf. Matt. 14:28-30). When Jesus tells Peter He must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, Peter says, "Lord, be it far from Thee, this shall not be unto Thee" (Matt. 16:22).

Luciani describes the sanguine at the cliff: "It's a mere nothing! I will start at once!" And then,

because he had foreseen nothing and realizes that sheer enthusiasm cannot withstand the cliff, he says, "I'm giving it all up. Climbing's not for me!" and he begins another project. How many sanguines have similarly tackled Lent?

"Yay, Lent!" says the sanguine on Ash Wednesday, after having thoroughly maximized Fat Tuesday. "This Lent I will do *all the things!* Not like last Lent!" But then, the first week of Lent slips by and our sanguine realizes that he has already failed to keep his resolutions. *Never mind*, he says to himself, *I have plenty of time to recover! I will start fresh next week!*

Sanguines love to remind friends and family that the forty days of Lent do not include Sundays! Plus, there are important feast days such as St. Joseph's and the Annunciation to give some festive respite to the sanguine heart. For sanguines embarking on Lent, virtues to work on will include perseverance and self-control. Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind will be Christ's pronouncement to sanguine Peter: *Duc in altum!* Go deep! Do not settle for a superficial living of your faith. Meditate deeply upon Scripture and contemplate Our Lord's Passion. Do not fear the Cross, but hold firm to your faith in Our Lord's triumphant Resurrection. And ultimately, without the Cross there can be no Resurrection.

Melancholic

The **melancholic** temperament is slow to respond initially, but once the impression is made, the response is intense and long-lived. Melancholics are sensitive, often artistic,

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Donald Trump

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in a tweet for the inconsistent and illogical position that the murder of an innocent child is justified in the cases of rape or incest,¹⁰ unlike that 2019 tweet, Trump did not state he is “strongly Pro-Life” in his January 1, 2023 post on Truth Social.

Trump’s dumping of unwarranted blame on the pro-life movement drew swift and outspoken reactions from the pro-life community. Columnist Ben Domenech wrote boldly for *The Spectator* that “[n]o candidate who wants to give up on the abortion issue will be the Republican nominee in 2024, especially one who blames pro-lifers for being a drag on the party.”¹¹ Domenech was clearly referring to Trump, who is the only major candidate to have officially declared his candidacy for the 2024 Republican nomination. With each blow seemingly attacking elements of the coalition that elected him, Trump’s popularity falls.

Conclusion

Trump supporters, already frustrated by his fetish for the gene serums masquerading as a vaccine and his flirtations with the LGBTQ minority in the Republican Party, have really reached the last straw by Trump turning on the pro-life movement that provided some of his most outspoken support. What happened to Trump? How can we make sense of such a reversal?

It may just be poor political tactics. Trump may believe that the past two years demonstrate that he would be more successful repackaging himself as more moderate and more acceptable to the elite political classes. If so,

not only is such a flipflop unprincipled, it is likely a poor tactic. The elites will never accept Donald Trump. The tiny minority of LGBTQ Republicans are not sufficient to propel him to a 2024 victory and would not likely vote for a Democrat nominee anyway. Pro-lifers, on the other hand, are more likely to boycott an election in which, as Archbishop Viganò suggest in his December 20 letter, no strong difference appears to emerge between the radical Democrats and a compromise Republican.

In contrast to Trump, who is bleeding support all the time, Governor Ron DeSantis rode to a massive victory in his reelection as Florida’s governor. He ran on a platform which, rather than distancing himself from the anti-establishment views formerly held by Trump, doubled down on them. He appointed an honest doctor as Florida’s Surgeon General, one who refused to put the COVID jabs on the schedule of school-required vaccines. He announced an empaneling of a grand jury to investigate the drug dealers of the vaccines for injuries and harms caused. In his inaugural address as governor on January 3, 2023, he denounced the World Economic Forum and the corrupt Washington and corporate elites. Rather than catering to the LGBTQ minority, Governor DeSantis signed the Parental Rights Act into law that forbade the scandalizing of young school children with the LGBTQ sexualizing agenda. Even though he was attacked by one of the biggest contributors to Florida’s economy, Disney, DeSantis went to war with Disney in order to defend this law

dubbed by opponents the “Don’t Say Gay” law. Rather than backing away from this law to help parents protect their children from the grooming agenda of the LGBTQ minority, DeSantis highlighted this law with a reference during his inaugural address:

“We must ensure school systems are responsive to parents and to students, not partisan interest groups, and we must ensure that our institutions of higher learning are focused on academic excellence and the pursuit of truth, not the imposition of trendy ideology.”¹²

Rather than running to appease enemies of the Catholic cause, DeSantis sounded more like Trump in 2016 than Trump did himself. He declared: “We do not run from this responsibility; we welcome it. We will be on our guard. We will stand firm in the faith. We will be courageous. We will be strong! And we thank God and are proud to be citizens of the great Free State of Florida!”

Perhaps in these words of Governor DeSantis we can find the answer to what really happened to Trump: the need to stand firm in the Faith. DeSantis is a Catholic married in the Church to another Catholic. Trump, on the other hand, is not Catholic and has been civilly married three times with two divorces. Although presented with a moment of grace in his actions to defend truth and goodness, Trump did not fully respond to that grace. He has never embraced the Catholic Faith. Much was possible for him on the natural level, but as we know from Our Lord, “without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Notwithstanding all the payers urged by



Gov. Ron DeSantis delivering his inaugural address at the beginning of his second term as Governor of Florida (Jan. 3, 2023).

Archbishop Viganò for his conversion, Trump remains outside the Church and in an apparently invalid marriage with Melania. Perhaps his moment of grace has passed, and we are seeing his decomposition politically as a result.

Only time will tell, but at this point each misstep seems to reduce support for what might have seemed two years ago as certain victory in obtaining the Republican nomination for president in 2024. It is too early to make decisions about voting in 2024, but public figures such as Archbishop Viganò are right to sound a public alarm for Trump to change course from recent events or face a further downfall in support. As sad as it is to watch this reversal of fortunes, it should be a reminder that although politics is the art of the possible, we can do nothing without Christ the King. We can hold back the forces of evil for a time, as Trump seemed to do, but only Christ and His Blessed Mother can defeat evil. Only by embracing Christ as King of America can a true and lasting political prosperity be inaugurated in our country.

Notes:

1. <https://catholicfamilynews.com/blog/2020/06/06/archbishop-vigano-to-president-trump-beware-the-deep-church-as-well-as-the-deep-state>.

deep-state.

2. <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/trump-tweets-archbishop-viganos-open-letter-published-by-lifesitenews-i-hope-everyone...reads-it>.
3. <https://catholicfamilynews.com/blog/2020/10/30/open-letter-to-president-donald-trump>.
4. <https://catholicfamilynews.com/blog/2020/10/28/in-hoc-signovinces-is-president-trump-the-constantine-of-our-time>.
5. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-booped-alabama-rally-after-telling-supporters-get-vaccinated-n1277404>.
6. <https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/trump-hosts-gala-for-homosexual-republicans-after-biden-signs-same-sex-marriage-law>.
7. <https://catholicfamilynews.com/blog/2022/12/20/abp-viganodenounces-trumps-endorsement-of-lgbtq-ideology>.
8. <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/pro-lifers-slam-trump-for-blaming-candidates-who-mishandled-abortion-issue-for-gop-midterm-results>.
9. <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/109615636263894025>.
10. <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/05/19/donald-trump-abortion-twitter-1332803>. Trump’s 2019 tweet also included a so-called exception for “the life of the mother.” This is not really an exception but refers to certain cases in which treatment of a mother may unintentionally result in the loss of the child, which is obviously distinct from cases simply sanctioning murder because the child was conceived in a criminal act.
11. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/trumps-war-on-pro-lifers-is-a-sign-of-desperation>.
12. A full transcript can be found here: <https://www.flgov.com/2023/01/03/governor-desantis-delivers-inaugural-address-sets-priorities-for-second-term>.

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and have a natural affinity for the ideal – for truth, beauty, and goodness. Just the opposite of the sanguine, the melancholic is cautious, rather pessimistic, and serious. Melancholics sometimes hesitant to begin new projects (always foreseeing all the potential obstacles) and perfectionistic about getting all the details right. Virtues for melancholics young and old alike to work on include charity, forgiveness, and gratitude.

Melancholics embrace with holy austerity the penitential season of Lent. Ashes are worn proudly, difficult mortifications are vigorously undertaken, and bygone days of rending

one’s garments and wearing sackcloth are viewed with nostalgia. Long-suffering is their mantra. Melancholics tend to hold everyone (including themselves) to what sometimes can become an impossibly high standard. They look askance at those frivolous sanguines who take Sundays off from fasting and abstinence. “I don’t know what Catechism you’ve been reading,” they sniff reprovingly. However, pride can sneak in to steal their virtue. The perfection that God calls us to is not *perfectionism*, but the perfection of love. Try not to make your sacrifices a cross for others! And recall what St. Paul told the Philippians: “Rejoice in the

Lord always: again, I say, rejoice” (Philip. 4:4). Luciani, too, reminds the melancholic temperament that *evangelos* means “good news.”

Conclusion

You may wonder why God didn’t give each of us all the natural virtues we would need to become holy. In fact, He told St. Catherine of Siena that He specifically gives each person a “primary virtue” – for one it will be charity, for another it will be courage, and yet another humility. God did not give any one person *all* the natural gifts and virtues so that we would “have reason – necessity, in fact – to practice mutual charity.”⁷

With this brief summary of the four classic temperaments, we can readily see that our Lenten observances can be both a challenge and sometimes a frustrating battle! Yet this will be precisely where we need to work! Ultimately our Lenten practices should draw us closer to God and to others.

Laraine Bennett co-authored with her husband, Art, *The Temperament God Gave You, The Temperament God Gave Your Spouse, The Temperament God Gave Your Kids, The Emotions God Gave You, Tuned In, and Catholic and Married. She also created the new game, Know Thyself! The Game of Temperaments (Sophia Institute Press, 2022) and has written two solo books, the latest of which is The Little Way of*

Living with Less: Learning to Let Go with the Little Flower (Sophia Institute Press, 2022).

Notes:

1. Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life* (Tournai: Desclée and Company, 1930; reprinted by TAN Books), 8 in Appendix.
2. Rev. Conrad Hock, *The Four Temperaments* (Milwaukee: The Palatine Fathers, Inc., 1962), p. 15.
3. Art and Laraine Bennett, *The Temperament God Gave You* (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 2005). Also, to discover your temperament combination, take the short test at TemperamentQuiz.com.
4. Hock, *The Four Temperaments*, p. 20.
5. Albino Luciani, (trans. William Weaver), *Illustrissimi: Letters from Pope John Paul I.* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1978).
6. *Ibid.*
7. St. Catherine of Siena (trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P.), *The Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 37-38.