



A spiritual guide to discernment, healing, and living soberly in Christ

Introduction

We live in a society where alcohol consumption is not only tolerated but often celebrated. It is present at birthdays, weddings, company dinners, Christmas parties, family gatherings, and even at church events. This phenomenon, known as **social alcoholism**, consists of frequent alcohol use in social contexts without the person necessarily being clinically considered an alcoholic. However, where is the line between sharing a drink and entering into sin? What does the Catholic faith say about this everyday yet profound issue?

This article seeks to be a **pastoral, theological, and spiritual guide** for all those who wish to live their faith coherently in a world that often trivializes what is sacred—including the care of body and soul. We want to help you discern clearly the role of alcohol in the life of a Christian, without moralism, but also without relativism.

1. A Look at History: Wine in the Biblical and Christian Tradition

Wine has accompanied humanity since ancient times. In **Sacred Scripture**, its presence is constant and ambivalent: it can be a sign of joy and blessing, but also of perdition.

- **A symbol of blessing:**

“Wine gladdens the heart of man” (Ps 104:15).

Also, at the wedding in Cana (Jn 2:1–11), Jesus’ first miracle was turning water into wine, foreshadowing the joy of the Kingdom.

- **A symbol of perdition:**

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Prov 20:1).

St. Paul warns: “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18).

In **Catholic liturgy**, wine acquires its most sacred meaning: it is **transformed into the Blood of Christ** during Holy Mass. This obliges us to a profound reverence for this drink that can be, at the same time, a sign of salvation and of perdition.



2. What Is Social Alcoholism?

Social alcoholism is not defined so much by the quantity of alcohol consumed but by its **cultural normalization and role in social interaction**. Drinking is not only tolerated but almost expected in certain settings to “fit in,” “relax,” “celebrate,” or even “survive” social pressures.

Many sincere Christians ask themselves:

“Is it wrong to toast with wine at Christmas?”

“Am I sinning if I have a few drinks with friends?”

“Can I be a practicing Catholic and still drink socially?”

The answer is not a simple “yes” or “no,” but an invitation to discernment.

3. The Moral Criterion: When Does Alcohol Become Sin?

From the moral point of view, the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** is clear:

*“The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco, or medicine”
(CCC 2290).*

This leads us to identify **four levels of moral involvement** with alcohol:

1. **Moderate and responsible use (no sin)**

Drinking in moderation, without losing rational control or harming anyone, is not sinful in itself. It can be an expression of legitimate fraternity or celebration.



2. Occasional excessive use (venial or mortal sin, depending on the case)

Occasional drunkenness may be a **venial sin** if there is no full knowledge or deliberation. If done with full intent, knowing the physical, moral, or spiritual harm it brings, it can become a **mortal sin**.

3. Habitual drunkenness (grave habitual sin)

Repeated or habitual intoxication, especially if it interferes with family, work, or religious duties, is **grave matter** and a mortal sin.

4. Scandal or bad example (aggravated sin)

If alcohol consumption leads others to sin (e.g., minors, vulnerable people, or those in recovery), one incurs the **sin of scandal**, which is very grave in the eyes of the Gospel:

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Mt 18:6).

4. The Spiritual Root: What Is the Heart Seeking When Drinking?

Often, the problem is not in the glass but in the **inner emptiness** we try to fill with it. The human soul was created to be **satisfied by God**, but when we turn away from Him, we seek substitutes: alcohol, pleasure, fame, power...

Ask yourself sincerely:

- Why do I drink?
- What am I missing that I try to find in alcohol?
- Am I seeking escape, belonging, courage, forgetfulness?

In many cases, alcohol abuse **is a symptom of a deeper spiritual wound**: lack of meaning, sadness, stress, trauma, existential emptiness.



5. A Practical Guide to Living Christian Sobriety

Sobriety is not just abstaining from alcohol but **a spiritual attitude**, a virtue that involves moderation, balance, vigilance, and openness to God's grace.

A. **Examine your conscience**

Ask yourself concrete questions:

- Do I lose control when I drink?
- Does it negatively affect my family or my Christian witness?
- Do I justify the unjustifiable with social excuses?
- Could I be an example to a child or young person watching how I behave under the influence of alcohol?

B. **Practice temperance**

Temperance is one of the four cardinal virtues. It is the inner strength that allows us to say "enough" when something begins to dominate us. Praying for this virtue is essential.

C. **Turn to the sacraments**

Confession is a means of healing, not just forgiveness. Don't be afraid to humbly bring your falls to the priest. The Eucharist, on the other hand, strengthens the soul and unites us to the true wine that does not intoxicate but gives eternal life.

D. **Seek help if needed**

If you feel you can't stop drinking or if alcohol has begun to dominate your life, **you are not alone**. There are Catholic movements such as **Alcoholics Anonymous with a spiritual foundation**, Christian life communities, priests, and professionals who can help you.

E. **Be a witness of freedom**

We live in a culture enslaved by appearance and pleasure. A Christian who lives soberly, without losing joy, **is a beacon** in the midst of the storm. Your example can save more lives than you imagine.



6. A Call to Inner Freedom

St. Paul writes:

*“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything”
(1 Cor 6:12).*

This is the key: **the freedom of the Christian is not doing whatever I want but doing what edifies me** and does not enslave me. Christ calls us to be **free men and women**, not dependent on anything or anyone, but **filled with the Holy Spirit**.

7. A Message for Everyone

- **If you’ve never had problems with alcohol**, be grateful and continue cultivating temperance. Be an example to others.
 - **If you’ve been drawn into social alcoholism**, do not condemn yourself. Reflect, correct course, and seek to live with greater authenticity.
 - **If you are trapped in addiction**, do not be afraid: **God can lift you from the pit**. There are paths of healing, and you are not alone.
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Conclusion

Alcohol is not the enemy of the Christian, but neither is it his savior. **Christ is the true wine that brings joy without a hangover, strength without violence, communion without confusion**. He invites us to drink from His cup: the cup of sacrifice, of self-giving, of love that sets free.

In a world that normalizes the abnormal, the Christian is called to discern, to live wisely, and to be a sign of contradiction. Let us remember: **the limit of sin is not in how much you**



drink, but in how much you give your heart to what is not God.

Final Prayer

*Lord Jesus,
You who gave wine at the wedding in Cana,
teach me to use wisely the gifts of this life.
Make me sober, temperate, and free.
Deliver me from all slavery,
and let me drink only of Your love,
the source of eternal life. Amen.*