



Over the past few years, our family has been exploring my husband's Swedish roots. We've mastered making Swedish meatballs and the pantry is always stocked with lingonberry jam from IKEA. We've tried to incorporate Swedish traditions into our family celebrations, especially those that enhance our Catholic faith. Our favourite is the Feast of St. Lucy: every year on the morning of December 13, the eldest daughter of the family traditionally makes *lussekatter* (S-shaped saffron buns) and serves them to the rest of family wearing a wreath of lit candles on her head. We don't do the latter, of course, because we don't favor the smell of burnt hair with our morning coffee, but for many years (at least until adolescence!) our daughter Mia wore a wreath of fake leaves and felt candles while serving breakfast to her siblings.

The newest Swedish notion we've begun to explore is the concept of *lagom*, which, loosely translated as "not too little, not too much," is the art of balanced living. To Swedes, *lagom* in daily life is a sense of balance and moderation in all they do. It means work, rest, and play in equal measures. At work, it means taking time for *fika*, a morning and afternoon coffee break (traditionally with *kanelbullar*, or cinnamon buns) that is as much an institution as work itself. At home, it means balancing the "stuff" with an equal amount of clean, bright, open space. In conversation, it means listening as much as they speak, and embracing silent pauses as a chance for everyone to reflect.

*Lagom* is really the virtue of Temperance, which calls us to moderate our desires and appetites so that we find balance in the use of created goods. Pursuing the virtue of temperance means practicing restraint and avoiding extremes not just in what and how much we eat, but in how we spend our time, what we purchase and consume, and even how we dialogue with our neighbour.

But hidden in the word *lagom* is a second virtue. That root *lag-* comes from the Old Norse word *lag*, meaning "that which is laid down." Not surprisingly, English has a lot of words containing that same root, including *lie* and *lay*, *low*, *ledger*, and most importantly, the word *law*, the social order that rules a community and takes the whole, rather than just the individual, into account. This is Justice, the moral virtue that is considerate of the rights, dignity, and equity of our neighbour.

Often when I think of practising the virtue of Temperance, I think of it for my own good: if I moderate what I eat and stick to my diet, I'll lose weight; if I moderate what I spend and stick to my budget, I'll save money for something else I want to use it for. Even when I moderate how much I talk in a conversation, I often do so less for the person with whom I'm speaking, and more for my own benefit, so that I don't appear too garrulous or to be monopolizing the conversation.

Learning about and practising *lagom* has taught me that when I practice restraint and balance, justice is never far behind. *Lag* in Swedish means "team", so when I take not too little, not too much, but just the right amount, it is an act of ensuring that there is just the right amount for everyone else as well. When I show restraint in how much I eat, work, rest, buy or even speak, it takes into account the other, making sure that they too have enough to eat, enough of my time, enough space, and enough silence in which to speak. When I practice the virtue of temperance (build the habit of balance, or embrace the Swedish custom of *lagom*) in my own life, I may benefit, but more importantly, I extend the virtue of Justice to my neighbour.