

Gluttony & Asceticism

We are nearing the end of our look at the seven deadly sins and seven life-giving virtues. At the plate this week is gluttony and its antidote, asceticism. According to the Catechism, **gluttony** is “*Overindulgence in food or drink.*”

When thinking of gluttony, I am reminded of one of my mother’s four cats, Big Leroy Brown. His name says it all. Unfortunately, my poor mother had to put Big Leroy down last weekend.

In his younger years, Leroy loved to sprawl out on the end table. He was so big that there was no place even to put my glass of water. Oddly enough, he didn’t seem to care. He gave me that look like, “Too bad. I’m here. Deal with it.” Big Leroy embodied gluttony in a “big way.” I wish they made cat treadmills. If they did, it would be my mother’s next birthday present.

A good number of people struggle with gluttony at one time or another in their lives. Let’s face it. Food is good! However, the body only needs so much. Beyond that, it has to work overtime.

Concerning drink, and particularly alcoholic drink, overindulgence can be particularly dangerous. As many know, consuming excessive alcohol regularly not only damages the body (e.g., the heart and liver), but also the intellect and your ability to make decisions. For example, many people have made decisions while intoxicated that they never would have made while sober.

Unfortunately, concupiscence (i.e., our inclination to sin) makes it difficult to exercise temperance in food and drink. In some sense, we could say our appetite for food and drink is like an untrained puppy. Without discipline and structure, it becomes “unleashed.” (It’s amazing how I manage to sneak in dog references, isn’t it?) ☺

A major side effect of gluttony is that it weakens the spirit of penance. As the soul surrenders to the body and its desire for pleasure, the door opens for other sins of pleasure such as lust. It is no accident that sexual sin has commonly followed drunkenness. In short, gluttony weakens the will and your ability to be generous. The sin of gluttony compromises one’s ability to sacrifice for neighbor.

The antidote for gluttony is **asceticism**. Asceticism stems from the Greek *askētikos*, which literally means, “given to exercise” (cf., Fr.

Hardon's *Modern Catholic Dictionary*). On a natural level, we know that Olympic athletes and professional sports players put their bodies through rigorous discipline to be at the top of their game.

They do so to win what St. Paul calls a "perishable crown" (1 Cor. 9:25). If athletes discipline themselves for an earthly reward, how much more should Christians do so given their reward is a heavenly one?

Thankfully, every year the Church gives us the season of Lent, which is like the fitness center of the liturgical year. During Lent, we are invited to get our flabby souls into shape. Keep in mind, however, that you are to stay in shape not just for Lent, but for the whole year!

For example, the Church asks you to do a little extra penance on Fridays in commemoration of the Lord's passion. Examples could include: Refraining from eating meat or desserts, saying extra prayers, giving alms, no television, performing acts of charity, or telling the priest that his homilies are great. Actually, refrain from the last one. You could be lying.

Regardless, it is critically important to practice some form of mortification each day, and at the very least, once per week. There are always ways to do little penances, i.e., ways of exercising little "no's" so that your "yeses" are much more achievable and meaningful. By staying in shape both physically and spiritually, you will be more fully united with Jesus, your imperishable crown.

~St. Thérèse, pray for us!



What a Day, What a Day...



Discipline, Big Leroy, Discipline!