

Sloth & Zeal

This week marks the end of our series on the seven deadly sins and seven life-giving virtues. We conclude by focusing on sloth and its antidote zeal. Looking at the Catechism, it defines **sloth** as “A culpable lack of physical or spiritual effort; acedia or laziness.” While we typically associate sloth with physical laziness, it also includes spiritual sluggishness. Sloth is a disease of the will in that one wants to avoid exertion or action.

One priest remarked that sloth is the sin of our generation. Upon hearing this, I thought, “How can that be? Americans are so active!” He pointed out that hyperactivity is a sign that people do not take seriously the things of eternity. Casting eternity aside, one puts *all* of his or her energy into this world.

Bishop Robert Barron, for his part, puts forth that the great problem of spiritual sloth in the U.S. stems from relativism. If truth is not absolute, but rather varies from one circumstance to another (i.e., “That’s true for you, but not for me”), people become indifferent.

I once saw a clock with all the numbers mixed up and bunched together on one side that said “Whatever” in the center. In my opinion, it summarized the attitude of apathy or indifference nicely.

The late Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth, believed that sloth was the deadliest of the deadly sins. A prideful person can collapse or get burned and turn back to God, but what do you do with someone who doesn’t care about anything? They are like a big boulder that cannot be moved.

In Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the slothful must run continuously at top speed. They run swiftly so that no time is lost. For Dante, the slothful person lacks love (i.e., small-hearted). He or she needs ardor and passion for God who is so benevolent and merciful.

Unfortunately, sloth has serious spiritual side effects. It turns a person into a parasite. When an entire society becomes slothful, it is pretty much done. Toward the end of its life, the Roman Empire had turned to entertainment while the Goths and barbarians were at their borders. Sloth also leads to idleness, which is the “devil’s workshop.” As experience reveals, people are much more likely to get into mischief when they have nothing to do.

The antidote for sloth is **zeal**, and more particularly, holy zeal or zeal for mission. Once you have been touched deeply by the Lord, you cannot but help desire to *share* that love with others! Sometimes, I ask penitents in confession struggling with sloth to pray a decade of the rosary for the intention of apostolic zeal.

John Henry Cardinal Newman famously once said, *"God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission."* He added that while we may not know it in this life, we shall be told it in the next.

Practically speaking, be bold and ask God, "What is my mission? How can I best serve you?" As you discern your mission, be attentive to what others say about your gifts. Your gifts are at the service of your mission, a mission that God has particularly for you.

Finally, as you discern and live your mission, let Mary guide you. Luke says that she went "in haste" to meet her relative Elizabeth (1:39). Like Mary, may you respond with docility and joy as God guides you in fulfilling your mission. You can be assured that if the good Lord has called you to some definite purpose, He will see you to it and through it!

~St. Thérèse, pray for us!



"OK, time to begin the day..."



"Lord, show my mission!"
("May it include lots of walks!")