

## Sloth Continued

2 Samuel 1:5

Today, listen to the voice of the Lord.

How is he calling you this summer?

You are with David, preparing for kingship. Like David, your nemesis the devil, has been defeated by the grace of God. Sloth is a kind of ambivalence about spiritual discipline and one's duties, while the remedy is a sharp conscience.

Pray that the Lord draws you out of sloth to embrace the kingly mission he has given you. Pray for the grace of freedom and humility for all Exodus Men, just as they are praying for you.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord and Master of my life, spare me from the spirit of indifference, despair, lust for power, and idle chatter. Instead, bestow on me, your servant, the spirit of integrity, humility, patience, and love. Yes, O Lord and King, let me see my own sins and not judge my brothers and sisters; for you are blessed forever and ever. Amen.

A Reading from the Second Book of Samuel

Then David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

## Reflection

David is on his guard. He is not sure he can trust this Amalekite messenger. What we see here is the kind of vigilance that is necessary if we are to keep from falling into sloth. If sloth is a "slackness" or "relaxation of the soul," then vigilance is the antidote. How can we be vigilant and look for the warning signs of sloth? It will help if we have a better grasp of this deadly sin.

Sloth has been reckoned as one of the principal sins against which we must contend since the time of the great Egyptian monk, Evagrius Ponticus (345–399 AD). Evagrius identified eight "wicked thoughts" that he believed every person must contend against on the way to holiness. This list of eight later became the seven deadly sins of pride, envy, sloth, avarice, gluttony, wrath, and lust. Evagrius distinguished between sadness and acedia for his list, but these were eventually combined into sloth.

With sadness, there is an interior instability, an inner discontent, unease, or restlessness. The mind is ever-flitting; moods are ever-swinging. Sadness has to do with a kind of disappointment, frustration, heartbrokenness, or restlessness that comes about when one is enslaved to the passions or appetites. The passions or appetites are our desires for things like wealth, food, sex, success, entertainment, fame, possessions, etc. He describes sadness as a "dejection of the soul" or a "worm in the heart" that arises out of discontent. It is caused by an addiction to

sensual pleasure and often manifests in an inability to engage in contemplation and prayer. Sadness makes us unable to be satisfied. So we flit from one pleasure, one purchase, or one experience to the next. We become addicted to the “new,” and we are ever in search of the thing that will fill us. Evagrius says that someone who is temperate does not experience sadness because the temperate person is not inordinately attached to worldly pleasures and goals.

Acedia, however, is a kind of apathy, indifference, or “relaxation of the soul” that is manifested in disgust for work. It keeps one from staying in a place or persevering in a task. The moment something becomes difficult, the slothful person gives up or skips to the next task. Here, it is important to note something very important, namely, that sloth can manifest itself in hyperactivity as much as passivity. A slothful person may be very busy—too busy, in fact—because, unable to see any one task through to the end, he instead takes on more and more. He is just as likely to be overwhelmed as indifferent.

Evagrius says that the person afflicted by acedia stares out the door or window in hopes that someone will interrupt his work and take him away from it. Acedia is manifested by dreams of “greener pastures” and the indulgence of the thought that “if only I had this... then I would be happy or holy.” Acedia keeps us from serving God in our current circumstances and tempts us with the notion that our failure to serve God is due to an unideal situation. Acedia is wanting to be any place other than where one is, to be doing anything other than the work to which one is called. Perseverance is necessary to fight acedia. Evagrius advises us to “Set a measure for yourself in every work, and do not let up until you have completed it.” Evagrius traces sloth back to the problem of measuring every activity or environment by selfish pleasure. It’s no wonder why Dom. Jean-Charles Nault dubs it “the unnamed evil of our times.” [1]

Are you addicted to possessions? Do you find yourself itching to buy something new, scrolling through products, or browsing store shelves, hoping to find some trinket to amuse you for a few days or weeks? Are you addicted to experiences? Are you always in search of the next adventure? Are you irritated by your circumstances or home life? Do you find yourself coming home and immediately having a sour mood, feeling as though you are stuck in a life that holds you back? Do you resent your work and feel as though it is an imposition or that it is beneath you? Do you have a distaste for prayer or discipline? Do you find yourself distracted when it comes to the work of God? If so, you could be experiencing acedia.

In prayer today, search your heart further to see if you exhibit any of these tendencies.

Now place yourself before God, and converse with him.

Day 3 Action Item

Enter into true leisure.

Leisure is not the same as recreation or free time. True leisure is the freedom to engage in the highest things. Summer could just pass by with a busyness of vacation time: traveling, planning activities, and having a good time. Before you know it, you're back to normal life. There is nothing wrong with this, but we would miss out on genuine leisure.

What are expressions of leisure? The highest would be prayer, taking time for silent contemplation with God. Reading the Bible and reading other great works that help us think about important truths are leisurely activities. Listening to beautiful music, enjoying works of art, and watching and discussing uplifting movies are also real leisure. Any way in which we appreciate the beauty of creation reflectively is authentic leisure. Celebrating religious days with others –especially the Lord's day– is another expression of the leisure we are seeking this summer.

Summer gives us an opportunity not just for recreation but also to engage in acts of true leisure.