

Homily for 23rd Sunday Ordinary Time

November 14 – 15, 2020

The Noon Day Devil

Procrastination. It is something many of us struggle with, isn't it? Now here is the thing about procrastination. Procrastination doesn't mean I am doing nothing. No, it means I am doing everything except for the one thing I should be doing. I should be working on that math problem. There is that report that needs completing. I was going to re-arrange that cupboard today, I was going to make that challenging phone call. It is time to practise the piano, I was going to spend that time in prayer. I was going to have dinner started by now.

Back in the third century there was a Christian community formed in the Egyptian Desert. They are known as the desert fathers and mothers. They lived contemplative lives where disciplines of fasting and prayer were central to community life. In this stark and challenging environment they classified what are known as the 7 Deadly Sins. These sins are in order: Pride, Anger, Envy, Greed, Gluttony and Lust. Now if you are counting, you will notice I have mentioned only 6 of the 7. In the middle of the list, is the fourth deadly known as *acedia*. Acedia comes from the Greek word *akēdeia*, meaning “lack of care.” It is closely akin to the sin of “sloth”, but it is more complex than mere laziness or boredom.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, acedia is a kind of sadness about things that are spiritual goods, or a “disgust with activity.” A one-phrase definition is:

***the inability to choose the good. It's an affliction of the soul that attacks desire – our desire for the good.*¹**

And here is the thing about acedia, it is the hinge sin of the 7 deadly sins. The more we give into to acedia the harder it is to combat, pride, anger, envy, greed, gluttony and lust. This is because it is the sin that is most easily defined as the sin of omission, something we didn't do that we should have done – the meaning of “omission”. When we give room to this sin, we experience what the Desert fathers and mothers called the Noon Day Devil.

Think about this in relation to the Egyptian Desert. In the early morning the sand would be cool because the sun had not yet risen high into the sky. However by the time 11 AM rolls around and over the noon hour it is so hot. There you are in your hut and you don't want to move, you become listless and even careless – The Fathers and Mothers of the desert understood this can happen spiritually in our soul when acedia takes over and procrastination keeps us from doing the good. This in turn can make us more prone to buying things online we don't need, which is greed, making more trips to the fridge than is necessary – gluttony, or go to websites that lead us into the viewing pornography, - which is lust. Similarly because procrastination can be accompanied by appropriate guilt, it can make us defensive and self-justifying to combat the

¹ <https://news.rcdos.ca/2020/05/19/what-is-acedia/>

guilt, which is pride, lead us to react in frustration and aggression, which is anger, and leave us dissatisfied with who we are, resulting in envying others.

It is this sin of acedia that is at the heart of today's reading from Matthew. In the story three people have been entrusted with a great sums of money. 5 talents would be equivalent to 5 million dollars, all the way down to the one talent, valued at a million dollars. Notice Jesus says that "each was given according to his ability". So there is not an expectation on the part of the master, that each is equally capable to increase the return on the money given. But the master does expect each of them to take what they have been given and use it wisely. We know that the first two are men who act upon what has been entrusted to them in a way that results in their doubling the gift. Listen to the master's commendation of them:

***Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'*²**

Notice what they are commended for? It is their trustworthiness. They have done what was necessary and expected of them and thereby didn't succumb to the sin of acedia. And notice that the reward for their diligence is to enter into the "joy of their master". An experience of fulfillment and satisfaction for a job done willingly, purposefully and well.

But not the third man. Notice his perspective on the master is one that does not truly represent the character of the one with authority over him. Remember the master gave him a million bucks! But what does this third slave say when the master asks for an accounting of the talent entrusted to him?

Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'

He misperceives his master big time, transferring onto this generous Lord what is more representative of himself. He is the one who has procrastinated, not the master and consequently has stolen what belongs to another, the gift and abilities he had been given.

Dear friends, this is so often the way – we transfer onto God our shortcomings and accuse him of wrong doing, rather than seeing how acedia has dulled our minds and hearts, making us uncaring and not doing the right thing.

Listen to the master's response:

You wicked and lazy slave! So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹ For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰ As for this

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mt 25:21). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

***worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*¹³**

These are sobering words. Do you hear what Jesus is saying? There is a spiritual law at work when it comes to acedia. If we do not address it and combat it, acedia can end up controlling us and we can become less of a person – as diminishing of our true dignity and worth because even what we have will be taken away. What a contrast to from the first two who enter into the joy of the master – this one is thrown into the outer darkness where they is weeping and gnashing of death – Jesus’ most often used description of hell. Why is he so harsh? Because acedia is soul destroying as we see with the third slave. It leaves us feeling indifferent and careless and turns our hearts away from God so we misperceive him.

Now with all this in mind, turn with me to the first reading from Proverbs 31. This is the last chapter of this Old Testament Book. It celebrates a woman who is living a life where she is fully alive and the noon day devil has no place in her soul or home.

¹⁰A capable wife who can find?

***¹³She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.***

***³⁰Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.***

***³¹Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the city gates.***

I would invite you to take some time today to read the whole of Proverbs 31. For there you will see what is it that governs this woman’s life. It is her fear of the Lord. Now this does not mean she is afraid of God but rather lives each day reverently aware of him. Such reverence motivates her to attend to the things that need to be done with a willingness that shapes her into a woman of loving generosity and purpose. Such a woman who does not procrastinate is to be praised because her life is infused with meaning because she is centred in God.

May such a woman inspire us to combat the noon day devil – the deadly sin of acedia and so know the joy of the master whom we choose to serve in reverent love by doing what we need to do next.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mt 25:26–30). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.