

THE ROSARY

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LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER DISMAS SAYRE, O.P., *DIRECTOR*

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The Sacred Heart of Our Savior and the Immaculate Heart of his Mother are powerful reminders of the importance of our hearts. We may identify our heart as the all-important symbol of our physical health, or the safe place in which we guard our affections for those we hold most dear, but this does not begin to acknowledge their true spiritual value.

In the Scripture, the heart is the source of everything valuable in us – and the source of our knowledge of God. In the Old Testament, the Psalmist begs God to “create a new heart” within him, and when our ancestors turned their hearts away from God and found themselves in a physical and moral exile in the land of their enemies, the prophet Jeremiah preached that this punishment was an appropriate punishment for a people whose hearts were hearts “deceitful.” But our merciful Father promised a remedy – nothing less than “new” hearts, aligned as one, single heart, to return to God, and to know and love God whole-heartedly.

When we turn to the gospel, Jesus tells us our hearts are so valuable we will find them wherever we find our “treasure,” whatever we consider most precious. Our Savior adds that whatever comes out of our mouth proceeds from our heart, and this has the immense power to defile – condemn – us. These words not only describe the tremendous value of our hearts, they are powerful warnings that we should take care to make certain our hearts are in the proper place, for where we find them, we find ourselves.

One of the maxims of our faith teaches, “The Church believes as she prays.” To gain some idea of the depth – and breadth – of what our Church believes about the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts, we might do well to consider the litanies composed to honor them. In the Litany of the Sacred Heart, we describe Jesus’ heart as the holy temple of God, a glowing furnace of charity, a vessel of justice and love, the abyss of all virtues, and the center of all hearts. The Savior’s Heart merits these honors because, the litany reminds us, it was overwhelmed with reproaches, bruised for our iniquities, pierced with a lance, and victim for our sins.



OUR LADY OF FATIMA

Silhouette by Sr. Jean Dorcy, O.P.

These titles have an undeniably noble sound, but we must look beyond the words themselves, to grasp what they invite us to share. To call the Heart of Jesus a “furnace” or an “abyss” is to express our desire to be consumed by his love. Our prayer begs Jesus to accept us, with our manifold failings, as a sacrifice to his mercy.

The tribute paid the Immaculate Heart of Mary is no less awe-inspiring. The litany names her model of the Church, exemplar in faith and charity, and our Mother, not only given us by Jesus as he hung upon the cross, but who, beneath the cross, accepted us as sons and daughters. In the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night before his crucifixion, the human Jesus endured a moment of abandonment in which he asked the Father to spare him the coming anguish of the cross. “...nevertheless,” he added, “not as I will but as you will.” Our Blessed Mother must have endured a similar sense of abandonment at the foot of the cross. But her unblemished heart enabled her to look beyond the horrific sight of her crucified son, and to embrace not only another son – the disciple Jesus loved – but each of us.

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

THE CAPITAL SINS: VIII SLOTH

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

WHAT IS SLOTH?

Our dictionary defines sloth as “an aversion to work or exertion; laziness; indolence.” These words reasonably arouse the scorn of anyone committed to making a productive contribution to society. They may likewise excite our indignation when we observe a co-worker or family member failing to bear a reasonable share in a common enterprise. However, this definition does not penetrate the spiritual reality of the sin we call sloth.

THE SIN OF SLOTH

What distinguishes the sin of sloth from merely wasting time playing video games or watching the tenth rerun of a television series is the part sadness plays in it, and its rejection of God’s love. These distinguishing characteristics require some clarification, so let us turn, for a moment, to our Scripture, where the author of the Book of Ecclesiasticus urges us to

Put [our] shoulder under [Divine Wisdom] and...do not fret under her bonds...when you get hold of her, do not let her go. For at last you will find the rest she gives, and she will be changed into joy for you. (Ecclus. 6: 27)

In the Latin text, “fretting” is described as *acedia*, which means moroseness or sadness, even peevishness. None of these should be confused with the mere laziness of the dictionary definition --- or with clinical depression, which, because it is a physical/psychological illness, is not sinful. St. Thomas Aquinas refers to some unnamed sources “who say that sloth is a *sluggishness of the mind which neglects to begin good.*” (ST, II-II, 35, 1) He adds,

Since, then, spiritual good is a good in very truth, sorrow about spiritual good is evil in itself. And yet that sorrow also which is about a real evil, is evil in its effect, if it so oppresses a man as to draw him away entirely from good deeds.

A DOUBLE AILMENT

This means the lassitude of sloth is a two-fold sin. First, because it rejects a spiritual good – God’s love – and secondly because it encourages us to refrain from employing that good in our relations with God and one another. Our *Catechism* observes,

Faith in God’s love encompasses the call and the obligation to respond with sincere love to divine charity. The first commandment enjoins us to love God above everything and all creatures for him and because of him...One can sin against God’s love

in various ways...*acedia* or spiritual sloth goes so far as to refuse the joy that comes from God and to be repelled by divine goodness. (CCC, No. 2093, 2094)

WHY EMBRACE SLOTH?

One might reasonably shirk some of the more onerous responsibilities of our Christian vocation, simply because, occasionally, at least, they seem so difficult and challenging. Doing nothing might seem a far more attractive option than practicing some of the works of mercy. However, why would anyone turn from God’s love and willingly embrace spiritual sadness in its place?

The Church’s classic theologians offer a number of answers. One is succumbing to simple physical strain. Psalm 90 (91) describes the happiness of the individual who trusts in God, and, as a result, has no fear of – among other ills – “the scourge that lays waste at noon.” Early religious writers interpreted this “scourge” as sloth, the ho-hum midday weariness that besets someone who has been fasting. Although this manifestation of sloth was historically identified most frequently among hermits, and others committed to the contemplative life, any of us may find our prayer life boring or unproductive, and this can lead to our grumbling “What’s the point?” If we allow the question to go unanswered – unchallenged – we may easily find ourselves turning aside from prayer and wallowing in a sea of self-pity.

Another cause of sloth is allowing ourselves to get so caught up with the demands of our everyday lives that we feel we “have no time” for the deep intimacy our faith tells us we must cultivate with God. This “busy-ness” may seem to contradict the notion of sloth as a form of lethargy, but if we allow our work or other responsibilities to impinge upon our spiritual life, we may find ourselves turning away from prayer, unhappily identifying it as simply one more tiring claim upon our already over-booked calendar.

THE REMEDIES: REMEMBER THE SABBATH

Sloth triumphs when we remove or omit God from our moral landscape. The Third Commandment tells us

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath day to the Lord, your God; in it you shall not do any work....

This is not an invitation to do nothing; it is a command to imitate God, who rested – not from being God, which would have been impossible, but from the work of

creation. This is far from the unhappy lassitude that identifies sloth. To surrender to a Sabbath rest is to take advantage of the opportunity to embrace the hallowed leisure of the Lord's Day, and to find one more source of joy in our relations with God.

KEEPING WATCH: STUDY

Our *Catechism* lays blame for *acedia* on "lax ascetical practice, decreasing vigilance, carelessness of heart." (CCC, No. 2733) Embracing the discipline of spiritual reading is one way to attack these ills, and we might begin by approaching the Scripture. Modern media also come to our assistance in this quest, and we can find "on line" copies of our Holy Father's reflections – as well as the teaching of other Church authorities – with very little difficulty.

PRAYER

Study is an unquestionably valuable undertaking, but the modern Catholic may be pressed to find time for little more than a casual glance at a missal to learn what readings will appear on the following Sunday. Challenging ourselves to be more diligent in prayer is another way to fight sloth, and prayer has the advantage of being accessible at any time. Kevin Vost, author of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, quotes St. John Climacus, who addressed sloth thus

You there! You crass and sluggish creature... Who are your enemies? Who can destroy you?" And tedium may be constrained to reply... "The singing of psalms and manual labor are my opponents by whom I am now bound... what really slays me is prayer backed by a firm hope in the blessings of the future. (*The Seven Deadly Sins*, Ch. 8, "Slashing Sloth")

Ora et labora, "prayer and work" are keystones of the monastic vocation, and the monastic schedule clearly sets aside time for each. If it is faithfully embraced – especially if it is embraced as a sign on earth of the life we may look forward to in heaven – the monastic vocation should put sloth to rout. We have seen that this is not the case, however. If those called to the exalted planes of religious life can fall prey to sloth, what benefit shall the average lay person derive from Climacus' words?

PRAYER ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE

Making time for prayer may seem as daunting a task as setting aside time for study – not to mention manual labor – so Vost adds,

Does even the time, energy and focus required by the Divine Office or the Holy Rosary leave you with feelings of listlessness and fatigue? Then why not start with simple prayers? Even a prayer as short and simple as the Sign of the Cross, if prayed with an earnest heart, can start to send sloth into retreat. Indeed, some of the most zealous saints prayed it and signed it many times throughout each day. It is hard to let your mind wander after unlawful things when you are repeatedly praying that all of your thoughts, word, and deeds may be done, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." (*Ibid.*)

AN ADDED BENEFIT OF PRAYER

We may not immediately identify prayer with justice, but our theology teaches the virtue of justice is giving to others what they deserve. Prayer is one of the acts that is God's due; to pray not only draws us closer to God – and further away from sloth – but enables us to practice one of the Cardinal Virtues, those good habits that are opposed to the Cardinal Sins we have been considering for the past year in these reflections.

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Our author suggests that seeking out the confessional is the frosting on the spiritual cake that delivers us from sloth. Sloth encourages us to do nothing, to care about nothing, to behave as if nothing matters but our own discontent. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an opportunity to address, and triumph over, each of those temptations.

The reason for this is quite simple: the Sacrament of Reconciliation demands our active participation. To enjoy its benefits we must bestir ourselves, abandon our lethargy, and approach the confessional. If we are to receive the sacrament worthily, we must engage in at least a cursory examination of our life: what have I done, what have I failed to do? What do I wish I had done differently? Finally, we must be willing to embrace the challenge to change. We may not be the most enthusiastic of penitents, but seeking the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to take a giant step away from the mire of sloth.

THE EXAMPLE OF MARY

Ronald Knox, a spiritual writer from the last century, composed a retreat in which he asked individuals to consider the calm, the quiet, and the serenity of the Virgin Mary. As we consider these qualities while meditating in church, they may seem very positive recommendations, but in these days of immediate, electronic gratification, quiet and calm people can often be mistaken for depressed, lazy lethargic – or slothful.

So Knox helpfully points out the calm individual's "knack of putting first thing first." And here we might think of our Blessed Mother. After St. Luke describes Gabriel's telling Mary she is to be the Mother of Our Savior, he describes Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and tells us she paid her visit "in haste." What is important here is Mary's paying her visit "in haste," but not "in a hurry." Our dictionary defines "haste" as speed, but adds that it is speed combined with a certain purpose or dispatch. This echoes Knox's observation, "Calm people don't need to be in a hurry, because they hasten at the right moment, about the right things."

THE CHALLENGE OF MARY'S "HASTE"

In the "Purgatory" of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the slothful souls repent of their sinful indifference by racing up the Mountain of Purgatory with "good will and right affection." ("Purgatory," XVIII, 96ff). Two souls in the lead cry out the passage from St. Luke, "Mary... went with haste into the hill country." They accompany these

words with the admonition, "Haste, haste, lest time be lost through little love."

We make a mistake if we imagine the gospel is a record of things that happened to other people, somewhere else, a long time ago. In fact, the gospel is a story told about us, here and now. Each of the individuals we meet in the gospel accounts is a reflection of us, and each of them illustrates what we ought to be doing – or what we ought to avoid. Mary is the model for the Church, so she is *our* model in all things. She is the Church's first tabernacle and its first evangelist, an individual willing to leave behind all the comfort and security of home to proclaim the Good News. And she is willing to do it "in haste." Our Baptism calls us to do the same. ■

SACRED & IMMACULATE HEART

Continued from page 1

Our celebration of the feasts of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts takes on special significance this year, as 2017 marks the one hundredth anniversary of Our Blessed Mother's appearances at Fatima. We may most often identify those apparitions with Mary's urging the young shepherds to pray for peace in a world embroiled in war, but her message also emphasized reparation to the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts. Jacinta and Francisco Marto, two of those faithful youngsters, will be canonized on May 13. We could do far worse than to take Mary's words "to heart," and follow their example, by offering prayers and personal sacrifices, especially in these days when our news media present the world's peace as a more and more fragile and elusive reality. ■

A CORRECTION

In the last issue of *Light and Life*, when Fr. Reginald reflected on the morality of homosexual acts, he observed,

Homosexual relations are an example of sexuality similarly misused. The *Catechism* teaches, "They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity."

One of our friends wrote to say Fr. Reginald had quoted from the first edition of the *Catechism*. The second edition, the writer observed, goes into great detail, and remarks "...tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered'... Under no circumstances can they be approved."

Needless to say, Fr. Reginald deeply regrets his error on so sensitive an issue. It was the result – quite literally – of wearing out his *Catechism*. He grew tired of taping the pages together, so picked up another copy, unaware it was not the current edition. He has since purchased a new copy of the second edition, and promises his references henceforth will be up to date.

REMEMBER THE TITANIC?

This would be an interesting question to pose to Fr. Duffner's mother, as our beloved former director of the Rosary Center was born on April 14, 1915, exactly three years after the RMS Titanic began the plunge to its watery doom. Fr. Duffner has fared far better, and, at the tender age of one hundred and two, still finds his way to the Rosary Center almost every day. Generous friends enabled us to install an electric lift by one of the Center's doors, and this provides great assistance as Fr. Duffner, who now uses a wheelchair, negotiates the way to his office.

WANT COMPANY WHILE PRAYING THE ROSARY?

Praying the Rosary for the World is a remarkable devotional work, and our friends are finding it particularly valuable this year, when we celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Our Lady's apparition at Fatima, and attend her admonition to pray the Rosary. Even the most devout among us occasionally find prayer tiring, so the poignant reflections in this booklet, prepared by the cloistered Dominican nuns at Corpus Christi Monastery, in Menlo Park, California, make it quite valuable for anyone seeking a spiritual companion. Paperback, \$2.50.

NEW DEACONS

Four of our Dominican brothers will be ordained to the diaconate this May 27th at 10 AM at our church in San Francisco, St. Dominic's. They will then finish their theological studies and be ordained to the priesthood next year. Thank you for supporting their education and formation through your donations!

NEW ITEMS

By request, we've added audiobooks of *The Secret of the Rosary* and *True Devotion to Mary*, two spiritual classics from St. Louis de Montfort, loved by many faithful. Each is about three and half hours of audio on CD. These are especially perfect for commuters or those whose sight is failing. \$17.95 each. We've also added a new audio CD from Fr. Brian Mullady, OP, "*Fatima and the Rosary: A Compendium of the Gospel*," just in time for Our Lady of Fatima's Feast and Centenary. \$10.

NEW STORE

Because of mailing requirements, our printed catalog is limited by space on how many items we can list at the same time, but our new online store has no such limitations! If you visit us at store.rosary-center.org, you'll be able to peruse our entire available inventory, and we add items there as soon as we get them.

