



Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon: Sloth

Proverbs 26:11-16

Like a dog that returns to its vomit
is a fool who reverts to his folly.
Do you see persons wise in their own eyes?
There is more hope for fools than for them.
The lazy person says, "There is a lion in the road!
There is a lion in the streets!"
As a door turns on its hinges,
so does a lazy person in bed.
The lazy person buries a hand in the dish,
and is too tired to bring it back to the mouth.
The lazy person is wiser in self-esteem
than seven who can answer discreetly.

Monday: Read Psalm 119: 1-33

In her sermon on the deadly sin of sloth, Beth reminded us that the sin of sloth is more accurately characterized as *acedia* (a Greek word meaning "the lack of care"). The monk John Cassian took *acedia* very seriously. He said that *acedia* threatens to undermine a person's fundamental identity as someone devoted to developing a lifelong relationship with God. Psalm 119 highlights the contrast between such devotion and *acedia*. In verse 28, the psalmist finds himself overcome with weariness and feels this oppression interfering with his daily meditation on God's law, a signature spiritual practice expressing his love and faithfulness to God. In verse 29 the psalmist asks for God's help in getting out of the trap of *acedia* so that he can move forward in faithfulness. When you feel overcome by a sense of *acedia* in your faith what helps you regain your faithfulness? How is your fundamental identity as a person of faith undermined by the vice of *acedia*?

Prayer: When my soul melts away for sorrow, teach me again to follow your ways, O God. Amen.

Tuesday: Read James 1: 19-27

The Letter of James, written for the Christian communities of the dispersion outside of Palestine, is still relevant in our world. It stresses the importance of works - the concrete practice of love. We must not merely listen to the Word; we must act. For James, putting love into practice is closely linked to the worship of God (v. 27). Solidarity with the poor is not only an ethical requirement but also a way to encounter the Lord, who identified himself with the lowest of the low (see Matthew 25:40). One cannot separate action and prayer, struggle and contemplation, solidarity and inner life. True religion is never a flight from the realities of life. Translated into concrete acts of love, the language of faith can rediscover its power and meaning. Then the words of the Gospel can touch people's hearts and can change their lives. If the sin of sloth is not caring, then the healing virtue for it must be active faithfulness. In what ways do you put your faith into action? "*Ubi caritas Deus ibi est*" (Where charity and love are found, God is there). When have you experienced this? How can you live this out today?

Prayer: May I be a doer of your word, Lord, acting in love to bring your justice and peace to others. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Ephesians 4:29-5:2

Theologian Thomas Aquinas's take on acedia (lack of care) explains its traditional reputation as a serious vice. When acedia shapes our hearts, we resist our identity in Christ and his Spirit's presence in us. We balk at God's invitation to "be imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1) and to be transformed by him throughout the rest of our lives. If that's not a description of a significant vice, it's hard to see what else might count. Acedia lures us when we want the security of having God's love without an ongoing willingness to be made new. A person with acedia essentially says, "I want God to love me, but being changed by Christ's love is too hard. I want the comfort and security of being loved by God, without having to give back, sacrifice anything, take responsibility, or invest myself in the relationship over the long haul." In what ways do you need to work on being an imitator of God? When has comfort and security outweighed the call to serve and grow?

Prayer: Thank you God for your grace when I fall short of your call to continually deepen my faith. Strengthen me for the journey. Amen.

Thursday: Read Matthew 25: 31-46

Christianity is not a faith of right thought or moralistic thinking. Christianity is a life that integrates faithful understanding and faithful action. Jesus says as much in Matthew with his story of the sheep and goats. The sheep and goats are separated by one criterion: not how many Bible verses they memorized, or what they ate, or how many laws they kept. It was in doing something for others in need. "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, hungry and you fed me, in prison and you visited. Inasmuch as you've done it to the least of these you've done it to me." The sin of the goats is not that they didn't have the right answers to faith's hard questions but that they did not act to relieve the suffering of others.

Why is it difficult to recognize Jesus in the face of others in need? What excuses do you tell yourself that relieve you from doing something about the suffering you see in the world? How can you take one step toward integrating your faithful understanding and faithful action?

Prayer: Grant me courage to follow you Lord by putting my faith into action to relieve suffering. Amen.

Friday: Read Hebrews 12: 1-4

The "great cloud of witnesses" that surrounds us are people from every age whose lives were determined by their faith in God. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews compares them to sports fans in the stands of a stadium. They have already finished their race. But they do not lose interest in those who are still struggling and running. They urge them on and applaud them. That is how witnesses support our faith and encourage our faithful action as participants in the race. But however encouraging the presence of these witnesses is, we are not called to look at them but at "Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith." Jesus himself agreed to run a difficult race, to keep going all the way to the cross to fulfill God's mission of love for the world. Do you know people whose lives were shaped by their trust in Christ? At what times of your life were they particularly important or helpful to your faith? What does it mean that you do not walk or run alone, but are surrounded by a "great cloud of witnesses"? How are they your supporters? How do I see Jesus? How does the fact that he was not only a popular teacher but also steadfast in his mission to God give you courage to continue in your faithfulness?

Prayer: Thanks be to God for those faithful witnesses in my life who continue to encourage my faith. Amen.

Saturday: Spiritual Practice

A Franciscan Blessing is a benediction in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi who famously gave up his inheritance to serve the poor. Below is one example of a Franciscan blessing from the twentieth century. As you pray this prayer today don't just say the words but as you pray determine what God might be calling you to practice that can turn the glittering vice of sloth (not caring) into the healing virtue of faithful action:

May God bless me with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that I may live deep within my heart.

May God bless me with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that I may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless me with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that I may reach out my hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

May God bless me with enough foolishness to believe that I can make a difference in this world, so that I can do what others claim cannot be done. Amen.



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