

DEADLY SINS—LIVING VIRTUE

Acedia

Working with God

- God places man in the garden “to till and keep it.”
- work is not yet a burden, but collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation.
- human work part of being created in the image of God
- work is a duty: one fulfills his or her potential (in part) through work
- work is for man, not man for work.

Resting with God

- creation leads to the worship of God
- indicates the right order of human concerns.
- human life has a rhythm of work and rest.
- man ought to rest and to allow others to be refreshed as well
- man can live this friendship only in free submission to God: he is dependent on his Creator

Effects of Original Sin

- harmony of original justice, is now destroyed
- visible creation has become alien and hostile to man.
- vocation of man and woman is burdened under the pain of childbirth and the toil of work.
- punishments help to limit the damage done by sin
- work can be redemptive if we join our labors to Christ
 - collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work.
 - carry the cross in daily tasks and duties
 - fills earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ.
 - all truly human undertakings become fitting sacrifice

Acedia

- refusal of the joy that comes from God: the delight of work and of rest
- depression due to lax ascetical practice, decreasing vigilance, carelessness of heart.
 - “a paralysis of the soul
 - “a slackness of the mind

- “a neglect of religious exercises
- “a hostility to vows taken.” (The Ladder)
- a voice claiming that God has no mercy and no love for men (Cassian)
- Pattern of Acedia (Cassian)
 - makes a person
 - horrified at where he is
 - disgusted with his cell
 - disdainful and contemptuous of others
 - renders him slothful and immobile
 - does not allow him to stay still
 - one feels that he is not accomplishing anything where he is
 - encounters bodily listlessness, hunger, exhaustion
 - anxiety and restlessness
 - leads to attempts to overcome it
 - fill up the time with busy work or distractions
 - fill the time with seemingly pious work
 - sleep
- leads to other vices
 - curious interest in the affairs of others
 - detraction: spreading (true) gossip
 - calumny: spreading lies
 - rejection of responsibilities, laziness
 - distractions and restlessness
- often experienced as dryness, though this may be from other sources

Fighting Acedia

- “Acedia is one of the eight deadly vices, and indeed the gravest of them all. . . .” (The Ladder)
- “The remembrance of past sins”
 - healthy repentance leads to desire to change one’s life
 - accompanied by a salutary pain and sadness (compunction)
 - must not confuse compunction with shame and depression: one is constructive, the other is destructive
 - God gives the grace of a new heart, and sets us free from shame and sadness
 - dullness and laziness overcome by love
 - recognition of our sins means we should not speak of others
- “Battered by hard manual labor”
 - attention to our own responsibilities leaves little time for gossip
 - work must be tempered by obedience, modeled on the obedience of Christ
 - diligence and perseverance are necessary
 - the time to do good is short
 - “paradise was not made for sluggards” (St Philip)
 - stability in keeping resolutions and sticking to the purpose
 - do not change your state in life frequently or quickly
 - always take the advice of those in authority over us

- “your cell will teach you everything.” (St Moses the Ethiopian)
- fighting distractions in prayer
 - no use trying to face them or reason with them: this only keeps them there
 - gentle, patient turning of the heart back to God
 - humble awareness of our attachments and distractibility leads us to rely on God for help and strength
 - distractions and temptations are never a reason to lose heart
 - dryness is a common experience in prayer
 - may be periodic
 - may be a result of our pride or unwillingness to commit
 - may be a gift from God to teach us to grow
 - a moment of faith that is overcome only by enduring it trustingly
- “thought of the blessings to come”
 - heaven is the state of supreme, definitive happiness
 - it is available to us because of the death and resurrection of Christ
 - desire heaven through the virtue of hope
 - place trust in Christ’s promises
 - rely on his grace, not our own strength
 - hope responds to the desire for happiness that is in us by God’s design
 - inspires and purifies human activities: must be ordered to the kingdom of heaven
 - opens the heart to expect good things from God
 - preserves us from selfishness and leads to charity
 - gives us joy even under trial

For you know how one must imitate us. . . . In toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you. We wanted to present ourselves as a model for you, so that you might imitate us.

In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat. We hear that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others. Such people we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food.

2 Thessalonians 3:7–12.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: “God Carries Out His Plan: Divine Providence” (nn. 302–324); “Economic Activity and Social Justice” (nn. 2426–28); “The Battle of Prayer” (nn. 2725–45).

St. John Cassian. The Institutes. Book Ten: “The Spirit of Acedia”. Translated by Boniface Ramsey, O.P. Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, Number 58. New York: The Newman Press, 2000.

St. John Climacus. The Ladder of Divine Ascent. Step Eleven: “On Talkativeness”, Step Thirteen: “On Despondency”. Translated by Colm Lubheid and Norman Russell. The Classics of Western Spirituality. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982.

Lewis, C.S. Mere Christianity, Book Two, Chapter Four: “The Perfect Penitent”, and Chapter Five: “The Practical Conclusion”; Book Four, Chapter Seven: “Let’s Pretend”, and Chapter Eight: “Is Christianity Hard or Easy?”. [First published 1952.] San Francisco: Harper, 2000.

Lewis, C.S. The Screwtape Letters, especially Letters 8, 9 and 12. [First published 1942.] San Francisco: Harper, 2000.

Please refer also to the general reading list provided with the course outline.