

We began this series on the Seven Deadly Sins by discussing the sins of pride and vainglory. These are sins of the mind, for they originate with the incorrect ideas about our own importance. These sins elevate the self above God and then above our fellow human beings. Over the last three Sundays, we've discussed the sins of *acedie* or dejection, wrath, and sloth. These are sins of the heart or emotions for they stem from our emotional responses. Over the next two Sundays, we will finish this first cycle of Purgation discussing sins that originate with our bodies – particularly with the fallen desires and appetites of our bodies that we as Christians are called to control. This week, we will discuss covetousness and next week we will discuss both gluttony and lust.

Covetousness is the desire to have things, particularly those things that others of our acquaintance have. We also know it as greed. The covetous person operates under the assumption that he will be fulfilled in life if only he had x or y. Yet upon getting these things, he realizes that his desires are still not fulfilled. He wants something more. If only I had that other thing, then I would have happiness. Of course, this is a never ending cycle. There is always something else to desire. In some cases, we work and strive to acquire an object only to be disappointed that it doesn't give lasting fulfillment. We begin to learn the futility of the chase. More sad perhaps, are those who never get what they desire, while it remains fixed in their mind as the key to happiness. They are locked in a perpetual futility.

As an example of this, I think of some of my experience with young boys. Often they are enamored of supercars – Lamborghini, Ferrari, McLaren, and the like. They get the calendars featuring a new car every month thinking, "When I get older, I am going to buy that car! I will have everything if I only have that car! It's so cool!" For us, we understand the relative value of those cars and realize there are other, more important things, we need that money to buy. Add on top of that, the fact that those cars drive on the same roads, wait at the same signals, and are stuck in the same traffic just like any other old car, and one can very quickly become disillusioned with such glamorous vehicles. But still, such infatuation with a thing, looking at it or at some grand experience as the essential element to happiness, is the spirit of covetousness.

For us, we are much more tempted by a desire for money. The needs are never-ending. Medical bills, houses, reliable transportation, taxes. It really is difficult to make a living in this world and in California in particular. Money is viewed as the answer to this problem. We think, "If only I had this much more a month! Then I would have enough and life would be grand." But when we get to that income level, we realize that it still isn't enough because our desires grow with our income. Relying upon money as a solution to our problems is idolatry. Money is tangible. You can hold it, you can save it, you can buy things with it to

make life easier. We end up loving money instead of loving God. When I pray to God, He doesn't seem to hear me. Yet, I pay with money and my desire is immediately fulfilled. It is easy to see how money can become a god, even unwittingly.

This reminds us of the verse in St. Matthew's gospel, chapter 6 verse 24, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." The word *mammon* comes from the Hebrew word that means money; but from ancient times, "Mammon" has also been associated with the demon of greed. When we appeal to money to save us, we should be aware that this is a false god, and we are indeed committing idolatry.

Now our covetousness doesn't typically show itself as naked greed, as a lust for money. Often we disguise this idolatry in the form of prioritizing work over everything else, especially over giving God what is His due. This is insidious, because to work with diligence is a Christian virtue as we discussed last week. So please do not think that this morning I am recommending not working to honestly earn one's own bread. But when we feel compelled to work so hard that we have no time for Church or for God, then be sure that something is out of whack. The worship of God—I would add, the corporate worship of God—must be the highest priority in our lives. We all will have times when we must be absent on a Sunday morning, but may we not be characterized by missing church, and especially by missing church because we "have to" regularly work on Sundays. If this is your situation, then I encourage you to consider changing jobs or making other changes which reflect a proper prioritization.

Does this sound legalistic? I hope not. Note what scripture tells us, and the practice which the early church established. Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, Sunday. He met with His disciples in the upper room on that day, and then He did it again eight days later. Furthermore the Church continued with this pattern throughout its 2000 year history. The pattern is then confirmed explicitly in the Prayer Book Offices of Instruction on page 291 as well as in other training materials. The question on page 291 asks, "What is your bounden duty as a member of the Church?" The answer is, "My bounden duty is to follow Christ, to worship God every Sunday in His Church; and to work and pray and give for the spread of his kingdom."

Given all of this, why then do we think that it is acceptable to upend this pattern because we have to work Sundays? Might I suggest that we should accommodate our lives to the Body of Christ rather than expecting the Church to accommodate us? Might I suggest that our skipping corporate worship to provide for our families is, at best, misguided? That it shows a

lack of faith that God will supply all that we need? That in working instead of worshipping God, we are, in fact, worshipping money?

Perhaps that is too strong of a statement. Maybe our parish will grow to a point where we have a Saturday evening service too. Perhaps we should just say that weekly worship, be it on any day of the week, is acceptable. But then I think that part of the point is that adapt to God's time, and not fit Him conveniently into ours. We are called to conform our lives to Him, as if he were the center of our orbit, and not merely when it is convenient. Of course this flies in the face of seeker-sensitivity, but there are enough of those churches around. We are called, individually and corporately, to something more, something that can only be attained by putting God and His Church first in our lives at a cost to ourselves. Putting Him first above everything, and I mean everything else. Above jobs, above the fun things that come up, above family, even above our physical needs. To be a Christian has cost many their lives. In many places today in the world, Christians are still tortured and killed. They did not say, "Well, I should deny Jesus so I can continue providing for my family." They instead place their families into the hands of God who is always faithful and who will always provide for His children.

Now you all know me. I am not going to condemn anyone for missing church. The point here is that I desire that each of you put God above all things. There are plenty of excuses, but God desires obedience, for obedience demonstrates that He is the most important thing. This demonstration is as much for ourselves as for the world, for when we make Sunday worship a priority, then we are putting God first in our lives. When we tithe, giving a tenth of our income to the Church, then we know that we put our trust in God rather than in our income or our wealth. When we attend the bible study or evening prayer, we acknowledge our continual dependence upon God and the Church, and we acknowledge that we don't know everything. Covetousness, on the other hand, shows that we don't really trust God in all things.

All of this is said by St. Paul much better in our epistle lesson which begins, "Brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Covetousness and greed are emblematic of living according to the flesh, which aptly describes our desires for things that can not ultimately satisfy. Being controlled by such desires leads us to discontentment and complaining which, like all of these sins, again leads us from God to death. We are called to recognize the falsity of such desires and to habituate a love of God instead. We, through the Spirit, put those desires to death so that our souls can live.

The epistle continues, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." God is the source of all we need. He provides, in Jesus Christ, everything we need for life and for salvation. Rest in that knowledge. Put your fears away. He is our heavenly father, and He takes care of His children.

So a good assignment for us this week is to take some time and write down what our idea of a perfect life would be. If this vision is sinful, then, of course, work to mortify the deeds of the body and to be instead led by the Spirit of God as St. Paul said. Many of our ideas will not be explicitly sinful – they may even be good. For example I desire my children to have rich faith in Christ – this is a good thing.

And then, ask the next question. What am I doing to make this happen? Some things that we do are healthy such as providing a good model for our children through living holy lives and providing good discipline when we have them at home and good counsel when they are older. But when our plans are frustrated, are we willing to give everything to God and to be content with what He has for us here and now? Or do we begin to manipulate or coerce? Are we willing to receive what God has for us or do we impose our vision, our ideas, upon others? Some things we can work in a healthy way to achieve. But let us never put the obtaining of things, be they behaviors in others, or even that Lamborghini on October's calendar page, at the center of our hopes and dreams. That place is reserved for God, and God alone. Rather let us receive with gratitude and contentment the good things, even the good difficult things, that God has for us as we continue in diligent and patient prayer, that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Let us pray.

O GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which are profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.