

February 21st, 2013

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

Last week we began the Season Lent with the Ash Wednesday liturgy - when the faithful are called to self examination with these words: *"I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy word."*

When I was eighteen years old I started taking my spiritual life more seriously and developed a Rule of Life in accordance with the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis. That Rule of Life required my availing myself to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As part of that self examination my priest, Fr. Robert Woodfield, suggested that I prepare for the sacrament by examining the Seven Deadly Sins, for which I discovered I was guilty of all of them! This Lent I would like to examine those sins with you over the Season of Lent and invite you to ask the question... "Am I guilty of this sin?" If the answer is "Yes" then the answer is Jesus!

No one really knows who penned the Seven Deadly Sins for the first time though most argue that they date back to the fourth century. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica it was Gregory the Great (Pope from AD 590-604) who first listed them as: Pride, Greed, Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Wrath & Sloth. These sins are considered deadly because when we submit to these sins they are thought to attack the Grace that we have received. Indeed if we give in to these sins fully we may lose our salvation. There is debate about whether one may abandon their salvation but if it is possible giving into these sins would be the way.

On just about everyone's list **Pride** is the first of the Deadly Sins as it harkens back to the "Original" sin of Adam & Eve - the desire to be like God - putting our pleasure - our status - our well being as our primary objective in place of God.

Of course, we are generally not so crass as to even acknowledge that Pride is an issue instead we rationalize - we say that we can only count on #1 - we refuse to recognize that all that we have and all that we are is a result of God's goodness not our own.

Pride leads to exaggerating our abilities and our accomplishments and leads us when we are not successful to play the victim because we are sure that if the playing field were level we would have not only



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succeeded but been victorious. Pride can even cause us to look at others and claim that they are prideful without recognizing our own pride. We can become very good at that game.

Sadly, sometimes our pride doesn't simply draw us away from church, but to church for the outward expression of being religious and not the inward and spiritual grace that we receive because we are blinded to our need for God in our lives.

As you begin the process of self-examination this Lent begin by asking yourself about the sin of Pride.

I pray you a blessed and Holy Lent,

Bishop Menees

PS. For Lent I am suspending my series on the 39 Articles of Religion. However, I will get back to them I promise!

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February 21st, 2013

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

I pray that you all had a blessed Ash Wednesday and a powerful beginning to the Season of Lent. This week we continue our Lenten Series on the Seven Deadly Sins with an examination of the sin of Envy.

In our culture, this is one of those sins that seem to be swept under the rug. How often do we say, "Oh, I'm so envious of you for xyz." In fact our culture does everything it can to make you envious of other people or situations. Indeed, there are whole industries that research how to make people envious of others or at least desirous of their product. But, of course they don't show you the real thing you see the image of the handsome strong Latin man selling beer—giving you the impression that if you drink that beer you too will be handsome and strong (I drank it and it doesn't work...). So what is so bad about the Sin of Envy?

St. Augustine's Prayer Book defines Envy as "dissatisfaction with our place in God's order of creation, manifested in begrudging his gifts and vocation to others." So what is so destructive about being "dissatisfied with our place in God's order of creation?" Well Envy leads to:

Jealousy— do you ever feel that secret pleasure at another's difficulty or distress? How about unnecessary competition with others for no apparent reason? Do you find yourself taking offense at others success or get upset when others praise someone for their talents? As a result do you find yourself talking trash about that person—stating that they are getting the attention they don't deserve?

Malice— taking that trash talking a bit farther people who suffer from the sin of Envy will too often slander others or initiate gossip against them. Their desire is to stir up mistrust of that person in the hope that the accolades that they receive will be directed toward them.

Contempt— this is especially insidious as it leads to not only the persons distrust of other people but of institutions as well. They feel that they've been misunderstood and under-appreciated for their gifts so they lash out against others who do have those gifts, talents, material possessions and relationships. While Envy will seem like such

a "minor" sin, it is, in fact, a cancer that feeds off of the sin of Pride and expresses itself in Anger.



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Jesus had to confront the sin of envy with an envious Mom and her boys... *"Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." (Mt. 20:20-23)*

When you feel the sin of envy creeping in, try praying for the other person—love covers a multitude of sins.

Blessings to you!

Bishop Menees

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February 28th, 2013

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

This week I continue my series, during the Season of Lent, with Sin #3 of the Seven Deadly Sins... COVETOUSNESS. Ironically, as I write this Bishop's Note I am sitting in the airport in Las Vegas after having visited **Jesus the Good Shepherd** (www.vegasanglican.org) in Henderson, NV. As I sat here thinking about which of the deadly sins I should write upon I note that I can see evidence of all of them right in front of me... or out the window as I can easily see the Las Vegas Strip. However, I didn't have to ponder long which sin I should write on as my eyes fall upon the people playing the slot machines and hearing an incessant call out from one of the machines... Wheel Of Fortune followed by a chiming of bells... hoping and dreaming that with the next quarter, or dollar, or pull of the handle all their troubles will vanish when the three stars line up in a row.

COVETOUSNESS, according to the Catholic Encyclopedia is, "*Generally, an unreasonable desire for what we do not possess.*" (www.newadvent.org) I don't know about you but I don't think that this definition is strong enough, "Generally an unreasonable desire?" The Lord wrote it down much more forcefully when he gave Moses the 10th of the Ten Commandments: "***You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.***" (Exodus 20:17 ESV)

Clearly the first aspect of sin here is the inordinate desire for material possessions - but more than that it is the desire for other people's possessions. But this is more than a material sin - it is a spiritual sin because more than the material possessions it is the perceived status or power or comfort that those possessions might bring that draws us.

This idea is so prevalent in our culture that the entire advertising industry is built upon tempting us to have things not simply because of the need... food, shelter, protection etc. but because of who those possessions will make us. Buy our bra and you will attract more men...drink this beer and you will be a wealthy athlete... if you love your child you will make sure to drive junior to soccer practice in a Mercedes Benz... my gosh it is to the place where millions of people watched the recent Super Bowl for the commercials instead of the game... and what was the commercial that got the most buzz? A super model and a super geek in a dispassionate and sloppy kiss. What was



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the message? Use our website tools and the geek will attract the beauty. You can bet that every geek watching that commercial wondered about the potential and every beauty thought..."NO WAY."

A covetous spirit is an anxious spirit believing that they never have enough and even worse...others have more. The sin of covetousness attacks our relationship with God because it turns our eyes and heart away from a spirit of gratitude to God for all His provision. Like all sin, the sin of covetousness turns our eyes inward instead of outward and calls us to compare ourselves to others instead of comparing ourselves to the standard that God has set for us... namely that we be content with what God has given us and strive to give to others by loving and caring for them.

This does not mean that we're not called as Christians to work hard and provide for our families... but it does mean that we work hard to provide the things that are necessary for our families: shelter, protection and sustenance. Imagine what our families would be like if instead wasting inordinate amounts of time pursuing that which provides status or power and instead spent that time praying and playing and serving together as a family.

My prayer for you this Lent is that you will examine any areas of covetousness in your life, admit to them, turn them over to God and then use the time and energy that you would have spent on that sin by serving others, preferably by serving with your family!

I pray you all a blessed and Holy Lent!

Bishop Menees

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March 7th, 2013

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

This morning's Bishop's Note continues our series during the Season of Lent on the Seven Deadly Sins.. We've covered Pride, Envy and Covetousness so far and today we look at the sin of WRATH or Anger...

St. Paul lists ANGER as one of the works of the flesh: "*Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.*" (Galatians 5:19-21) However that does not mean that Anger is always a sin the way that the other works of the flesh are.

St. Paul also tells us in his letter to the Church in Ephesus - "*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger*" (Ephesians 4:26 - 27)

I think the very fact that Anger can be both a sin and a virtue means that it can be especially dangerous in our spiritual lives and should be handled with great care and great honesty.

St. Augustine's Prayer Book defines the sin of anger in this way... "ANGER is open rebellion against God or our fellow creatures. Its purpose and desire is to eliminate any obstacle to our self-seeking, to retaliate against any threat to our security, to avenge insult or injury to our person."

The key here is that Anger can be sinful when used as a passion expressed for the individual as opposed to being used in support of another individual. That is not a hard and fast rule but a pretty good rule of thumb. If we were to take the time to ask... "Is my anger in support and defense of someone who is being harmed or wronged or is my anger in defense of my own sense of being harmed or wronged?"

Rather than focus on righteous anger for this article I would like to focus on the sinful anger or wrath. Sinful anger is a sinful decision to lash out at another in retaliation. It can be a physical lashing out with the intention of harming another person - generally the person we have deemed to be the source of our frustration. The sin of physical violence is endemic in our culture as seen in the wide spread media accounts - rising murder rates and acts of violence. However, from



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the media we can get the wrong opinion that violence of this type is random. Did you know that the majority of violent acts are perpetrated against family members and friends... you are much more likely to be murdered or attacked by a member of your family...which makes it doubly disturbing...the people we tend to trust the most hurt us the most or WE hurt them most.

Those violent acts come from a place of sinful anger! But sinful anger also causes us to lash out verbally. Again the people we love the most tend to be the people we hurt the most. We know how to slice and dice our loved ones with our words cutting to the heart and soul of a family member or friend. One of the things I want to ask God when I meet him in heaven is just that... Why is it that the people we love the most are the people we hurt the most? Of course the answer is... because we are sinful people. The question is will we allow that sinful nature to reign in us?... if you do allow that sinful nature to reign in you I would encourage you... encourage me... to go back to the scriptures and ask the Lord to create in us a new heart (Psalm 92) and to make us a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5) as we die to sin and live in Christ (Romans 6).

How is it that we die to sin and live in Christ? By going back to Jesus day in and day out... asking Him to forgive us our sins and to create in us a new heart... by reading and meditating on God's word daily... by spending time in fellowship with fellow believers being disciplined and discipling others.

God bless you!

Bishop Menees

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March 17th - Bishop @ Christ Church in Cambria

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March 14th, 2013

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

This morning we continue our examination of the Seven Deadly Sins as part of the Bishop's Note. So far we've examined Pride, Envy, Covetousness and Wrath. Today we look at the sin that gets so much attention in our age and our culture - Lust.

The Catholic Encyclopedia defines Lust as: *"The inordinate craving for, or indulgence of, the carnal pleasure which is experienced in the human organs of generation."* (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09438a.htm>) I don't know about you but that sounds like a sterile definition to me. I prefer the definition provided in St. Augustine's Prayer Book: *"LUST is the misuse of sex for personal gratification, debasing it from the holy purpose for which God has given it to us."* The Sin of Lust may be lived out in the flesh but it is truly a spiritual sin, transforming physical pleasure into an idol to be worshiped.

Jesus tells us that acting upon lustful thoughts is not the only way to sin. It is also allowing the heart and eye to wander... *"But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Mt. 5:28)

St. Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth that lived in the midst of the literal worship of Lust with the Temple of Aphrodite being a major institution in Corinth... *"Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body."* (1 Cor. 6:18)

Sadly, we too live in a world that has made an idol of lust...we don't visit the Temple of Aphrodite but we go to the temple of the intranet. A quick google search of keywords used in google searches showed that pornographic sites rated six out of the top twenty-five searches.

Internet pornography can be compared to a very serious bacterial infection with only one antibiotic that will work to kill it - and that is God the Holy Spirit!

Again in St. Augustine's Prayerbook there is a section on preparation for confession that asks the penitent to invite the Holy Spirit to assist him in to examine his conscience. In the section on the sin of Lust, the penitent is asked to examine the different aspects of Lust and they are:



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Unchastity. Violation of the Church's marriage laws. Lack of consideration for one's partner in the use of the marital relationship. Refusal to fulfill the purpose of Holy Matrimony in the bringing forth and giving adequate care to children, or to take our full share in the responsibilities or work involved. Unfaithfulness to one's spouse. Sexual indulgence outside matrimony, in thought or act, alone or with others. **Immodesty.** Stimulation of sexual desire in others by word, dress, or actions; or in one's self by reading, pictures, or fantasies. Collecting or recounting dirty stories. **Prudery.** Fear of sex or condemnation of it as evil in itself. Refusal to seek adequate sexual instruction or the attempt to prevent others from obtaining it. Stimulation of excessive and harmful curiosity by undue secrecy. Repression of sex. **Cruelty.** Deliberate infliction of pain, mental or physical. Tormenting of animals. (*Saint Augustine's Prayer Book Holy Cross Publications First Edition 1947*)

As you prepare for Easter I encourage you to take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As you do I pray that you too would invite God the Holy Spirit to open up your heart and mind both to show you the areas of sin you your life that you need to turn over to the Lord AND to experience the Grace of God's forgiving and transforming Love!

I pray you a blessed and holy Lent!

Bishop Menees

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March 21st, 2013

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This morning we continue our examination of the Seven Deadly Sins as part of the Bishop's Note. So far we've examined Pride, Envy, Covetousness, Wrath and Lust. Today we look at the sin that has become part and parcel with Western Culture but is, like all sin not unique to the West.

The Catholic Encyclopedia defines Gluttony as - (Lat. *gluttire*, to swallow, to gulp down), the excessive indulgence in food and drink. The moral deformity discernible in this vice lies in its defiance of the order postulated by reason, which prescribes necessity as the measure of indulgence in eating and drinking. (www.newadvent.org)

This definition will not be surprising to anyone...what is surprising is the way that we've come to accept this sin and promote it. I am the first to admit that this is a major thorn in my flesh - I've learned from my childhood to eat when I'm happy and eat when I'm sad and eat when I'm angry and eat when I'm bored and eat when... well you get the picture. The result of this sin is poor health or at least poorer than desired by God.

Like all things God gave us in creation food is good and pleasant in moderation. God not only created food pleasant to the eye but also good tasting... except brussel sprouts. I never ate a brussel sprout that I enjoyed ... so gluttony with brussel sprouts is not my issue. now enchiladas, papusas, candy yup that's it right there!

Why is Gluttony a sin... well unlike what our mother's said it is not because of starving children in Africa. It is because we take what is good and pleasant that God has given us and we go beyond being satisfied & filling to stuffed.

We tend indulge in the sin of Gluttony in an attempt to fill that void in our lives that only the Holy Spirit can fill. Instead of addressing an issue in our lives we avoid the issue and reach for food. For many of us it is a combination of sitting in front of the TV watching something mindless and going through the motion of eating, whatever, our of habit and instinct.

St. Augustine's Prayerbook takes it one step farther arguing that Gluttony can go beyond food to other behaviors such as: "Fastidiousness, fussiness, demanding excessively high standards, or dilettantism." Behaviors that often become compulsive in an attempt to control or to comfort.



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Of course, the sin of Gluttony goes hand in hand with a lack of personal discipline in spiritual and temporal matters as a means again of escape, control & comfort.

Sadly, this is one of those sins that the world around us both promotes and detests at the same time. Go to any restaurant and you will most likely receive portions much larger than is necessary or healthy. This is not just at one restaurant but essentially every restaurant in the West. At the same time the images that are promoted of people who are attractive are those who do not consume those whole portions... just the opposite the images of thinness and athleticism are those that are mostly unattainable for the average person who is not able (and wise enough not to) dedicate large segments of their day to exercise, appropriate food preparation and consumption.

Ultimately, the answer to the sin of gluttony, and essentially all sin, is to seek the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Only God can fill that hole in our souls that we try to fill with food, sex, alcohol etc. etc.

I pray you a truly blessed Holy Week!

Bishop Menees

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March 28th, 2013

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

Today is Maundy Thursday - the day that we remember our Lord's institution of the Lord's Supper or Holy Eucharist. It is also the day that our Lord so clearly demonstrated his servant ministry as he knelt to wash the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. This is the night that Jesus was arrested in the garden...arrested on false charges which he would not fight for he knew that he must suffer and die for our sins. It is appropriate then that I conclude my series on the Seven Deadly Sins with the sin of Sloth.

What comes to mind when you think of the word "Sloth?" For me I think of my mom telling me that I was messy and lazy as a teenager (sadly a true characterization of my adolescence...which gives me hope for my son). Yes, laziness is a signature of the sin of sloth, but more specifically it refers to spiritual laziness. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* defines sloth as... "*sluggishness of the mind which neglects to begin good...[it] is evil in its effect, if it so oppresses man as to draw him away entirely from good deeds.*" (2,35, ad 1) Sloth has its roots in Apathy which goes beyond indifference to willful indifference for one's own spiritual well being and the well being of others. Still the outward signs sloth can be witnessed in laziness. This laziness can be seen in many forms such as:

- o The failure to say our prayers or read the scriptures...just didn't get around to it.
- o The failure to care for family or friends...too much stuff on TV
- o Procrastination of things that need to be done but just don't strike your fancy.

Conversely, Sloth can also mean that we spend inordinate amounts of time on "pleasurable" activities that may not be edifying to self or the Lord: Television, internet, games of chance, etc.

Indifference is the second side of the coin of sloth. This may be seen with the neglecting of our duties...caring for family, attending church, serving on a jury. This may be seen with the lack of concern for the poor, the sick and the lonely and our unwillingness to reach out to others in need both near and far away. These are the things that we pray in confession when we say... "***Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.***" (BCP Pg. 360)



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With the Triduum before us (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday & Holy Saturday) I pray that we will set ourselves before the Cross of Christ to ask the guidance of the Holy Spirit to show us how we have missed the mark and fallen short of the Glory of God. It is at the foot of the Cross where Christ's sacrifice and blood wash us clean of our sin - even a "deadly" sin - so that we may be a new creation in Christ!

I pray you a truly blessed Easter!

Bishop Menees

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