

CHRISM MASS 2011

Today is the solemn Chrism Mass, which the bishop is now celebrating with his presbyterium, and in the course of which at the same time the priestly promises made on the day of ordination are renewed. It is a gesture of great value, an occasion all the more propitious in which the priests confirm their fidelity to Christ who chose them as his ministers. Moreover, this presbyteral meeting assumes a particular meaning, because we are still in the euphoria of the Priestly Year during which all the *dead places* in our priesthood were regenerated, restored and renewed. Blessed also in this Chrism Mass will be the oil of the sick and of catechumens, and the chrism will be consecrated. These are rites that signify symbolically the fullness of Christ's priesthood and the ecclesial communion that must animate Christian people, gathered for the Eucharistic sacrifice and vivified in the unity of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the examination which elicits our willingness for ordination, we resolve to consecrate our life to God for the salvation of his people, and to unite ourselves more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a perfect sacrifice. This is an open declaration of war against the *mysterium iniquitatis* signified in its satellites: the seven deadly sins.

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

There are seven capital sins: *Pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia.*
-CCC 1866.

Why do I have to speak to my Presbyterium about the *seven deadly sins*? The classification had its origins in the monastic movement. *The list was first framed in the cloisters of the Eastern church, and in the East it was and it has always remained essentially a list of the vices besetting the monastic life.* Perhaps one of the most unexpected facts about the pioneers of the monastic movement is the way in which many of them *plumbed the depths of the human heart in a way rarely equalled since.* Monks and priests have a considerable amount of time in which to contemplate the ways of the world on which they have turned their backs, as well as the longings and temptations by which their flesh and spirit are still encumbered in the cloister, the cell and the rectory. **Ronald Knox** in his book *The Priestly Life – a Retreat* [Sheed and Ward, **London, 1959**] devoted a chapter to *Sins of the Priest*. What do you think the sins are? The seven capital sins: fountain-heads of our sinning, ingredients which form the basis of all those subtle flavours which our sins bring with them. From these flow all the sins of commission and omission that we commit. *According to St. Thomas (Summa, 11-11:153:4) a capital vice is that which has an exceedingly desirable end so that in his desire for it a man goes on to the commission of many sins all of which are said to originate in that vice as their chief source. It is not then the gravity of the vice in itself that makes it capital but rather the fact that it gives rise to many other sins.*

The order of the *Seven Deadly Sins* as given by St. John **Cassian** and **St. Gregory the Great** (who lived from 540 – 604 AD) are Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust. Contemporary Moral Theology would arrange them as follows: Pride, Avarice, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, and Sloth. All the *Seven Deadly Sins* are demonstrations of love that has gone wrong. They spring from the impulse, which is natural in man, to love what pleases him. Pride, Envy, and Anger are sins of perverted love: love directed to oneself but in a false manner. Sloth is a sin of defective love. Avarice, Gluttony and Lust are sins of excessive love.

The *Seven Deadly Sins* point with deadly accuracy to our capacity for evil; they also leave us with a vivid and strong sense of what it means to be human. In the *History of Mary*, Dr. **Maclaren** believed that the seven demons were figurative representations of the seven sins of **Dante**, which are bound to be found in the hearts of us all, and that **Mary** was neither a great sinner nor was she a maniac but that she was perfectly delivered in this world from the evil that hounds each of us, namely, pride, envy, anger, lasciviousness, covetousness, intemperance, and spiritual sloth.

PRIDE (SUPERBIA)

Narcissus – Unwise and unheeding he desired his very self, one and the same person approving and being approved; seeking and being sought; in flaming and being inflamed.

Pride is the first of the sins, the root of the *bad will* of Adam and Eve, the beginning of all sin. The dictionary defines it as: *an inordinate self-esteem; an unreasonable conceit of superiority.... an overweening opinion of our one's own qualities*. In its family are: vanity, vainglory, conceit, arrogance, egotism, boastfulness, self-glorification, selfishness and many others. Pride is camel-nosed. It is also high blown, puffed-up, stuck up, stiff-necked. The proud man sets himself up and, in doing so, sets himself apart. A tower is one of the commonest metaphors of Pride. As **Horace** points out:

*'Tis oftener the tall pine that is shaken by the wind; 'tis the lofty towers that fall with the heavier crash, and 'tis the tops of the mountains that the lightning strikes.*¹

1. Horace, Odes, 11., 10, 9: *Saepius ventis agitator ingens pinus et celsae graviore casu decidunt turres feriuntque summos fulgura montis.*

It is lofty and inaccessible. It cannot be reached. When it is proud, *the soul becomes inordinately pleased with itself* and it makes a solitary world, self-pleasing. One is satisfied with oneself; only oneself is necessary. It is an unrestrained and improper appreciation of our own worth.

Pride is the cause of disobedience, which sets one wilfully at odds with lawful authority, in the family or in society. Pride is the cause of boasting and hypocrisy, which make it impossible to communicate intelligently with others. Pride is the cause of scorn and presumption and arrogance, which erect barriers against those with whom one comes in contact. Pride is the cause of impatience and obstinacy, which lead to strife rather than cooperation with other people. Pride is the cause of self-centeredness and vainglory, which set one apart to do merely as one wishes. Pride leads to such a swelling of the heart filled with its own self pleasure, that there is no place for others in it. Pride is the sustainer of our sinning, the reinforcer of all its motives.

The root of pride is rebelliousness, sweet solipsism and nihilism. *Dante* describes it as *love of self perverted to hatred and contempt for one's neighbour*. Pride like *Narcissus* loves its own reflection, spurning community. It destroys relationships. A proud and arrogant person cannot be right with anyone, including himself. The man who is constantly guarding his reputation and grooming his image is miserable in his own heart. He listens for compliments and feels slighted when they do not come. He hears every critical word, takes it to heart, and worries over it in the middle of the night. **Horace** in his *Epistle* deftly analyses the psychology of the proud as:

*Whom does false honour delight
Whom does lying calumny affright,
Save the man who is full of flaws
and needs the doctor?*²

Pride makes it impossible for a person to be at peace with his own soul. Not only that, it also makes it impossible for him to have a right relationship with anyone else. A proud man is a people-user. He seeks the company of important people who can enhance his reputation. He thinks he is a Gulliver, a colossus, the rest Lilliputians. Pride makes meaningful human relationships a practical impossibility. It also destroys the divine – human relationship. God will not deal with any of us on the basis of pretence. If we are going to relate to Him, we've got to get real. He illustrates this with the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican:

2. Horace, Ep. 1. XVI 17-40: *Falsus honor iuvat et mendax infama terret quam nisi mendosum et medicandum.*

*He told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.*³

Self-flattery is the next step to self-deceit. Success is apt to cover a multitude of faults; but if he trips, then, we shall know all about his vices, says *Demosthenes*, Second Olythiac. Pride sullies the noblest character – the avenging god follows in the steps of the proud.⁴

HYBRISTIC PRIDE

In investigating this capital deadly sin, we cannot but look at *Hubris*. *Hubris* is a noun which means *wanton insolence*: pride which erects itself against God and man alike. Its root meaning is the violent over-stepping of the mark, the insolence of triumph, and the pride of life that tramples underfoot the unwritten laws of gods and men. Its most characteristic application was to the insatiable thirst for power which drives a man or a nation headlong, as though possessed by a demon, on the path of unbridled self-assertion. These days of election testify to this. This blinding passion, outraging alike personal liberty and public law, lures the victim in a frenzy of self-confidence towards destruction. It provokes *nemesis*, the feeling of righteous indignation in the gods and in his fellow men. The basic evil of *hubris* is that when *hubris* enters into a man's heart that man forgets that he is a creature and that God is the Creator. *Hubris* is the sin whereby a man forgets his humanity and makes himself equal with God. *Hubris* is that insolent arrogance which forgets the essential creatureliness of the condition of being a man. *Hubris* is mingled pride and cruelty. *Hubris* is the pride which makes a man defy God, and the arrogant contempt which makes him trample on the hearts of his fellow men and women.

AVARICE (AVARITIA)

Keep clear of courts: a homely life transcends the vaunted bliss of monarchs and their friends.⁵

Avarice is not so much the love of possessions as the love merely of possessing. To buy what we do not need, more even than we need for our pleasure or entertainment is a love of possessing for its own sake. Luxury is the mother of avarice.⁶ Avarice is the inordinate love of temporal things, usually of riches. *Pleonexia*, in classical Greek, means an arrogant greediness. By the Latin moralists it is defined as *amor sceleratus habendi*, the accursed love of possessing. Cicero defined its equivalent *avaritia* as *injuriosa appetitio*

3. *Luke 18: 9 – 4*

4. *Seneca, Hercules Furans, 389: Sequitur superbos ultor a tergo deus.*

5. *Horace, Epistulae 1.10.32. Fuge magna; licet sub paupere teeto reges et regunt vita praecurrere amicos.*

6. *Cicero, De Oratore 11.40.*

alienorum, the unlawful desire for things which belong to others. Counting is the main pleasure of the miser and counting is the main object of avarice. This seems to be the badge of Parish Priests. The eagle eye with which they seem to watch Sunday collections and sweep down on them. *Money is the chief object of avarice, not only because it provides for the control of many other objects, but because it offers the very simple satisfaction that it can be counted.*

Avarice is high among the sins, and we cannot dismiss lightly the severity of Christ's words: *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*⁷ Avarice makes us as unfit for salvation as that. Avarice tears us apart. It does not leave us whole. Thus **Shakespeare** laments: *How quickly nature falls into revolt when gold becomes the object.* **Wordsworth** pitied the avaricious who love abundance and enjoy it not, by considering them as:

*getting and spending [they] lay waste [their] powers
[they] have given [their] hearts away a sordid boon.*

Like the miser, avarice is a form of solitude. Rich people generally are recluses. We are walled from our neighbours by our possessions. It is our avarice that drives us to be inhuman. It is also our avarice that leaves us no time or energy to care for our neighbours. Recall the Rich Fool in Luke 12:16-21 explicative of Luke 12:15: *Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions.* The lust of lucre, has so totally seized upon mankind, that their wealth seems either to possess them, than they to possess their wealth.⁸ Troubles of every kind stems from the love of money, (St. **Polycarp**).

One of the consequences of Avarice is *hardness of heart towards the poor, whether in not giving alms to those in need or harshly exacting payment of debts.* Excessive and unreasonable charges, failing to pay we deny them weddings, baptisms and funerals etc. The sins of avarice are sins of omission. St. Paul said Avarice is the source of all evils. By riches man acquires the means of committing any sin whatever and of satisfying his desire to sin. Avarice is self-love in one of its most perverted forms. We can in fact kill the life in everything we touch, just as King **Midas** did. We can be avaricious for people, making them reflection of ourselves.

Be very detached from money. May one never be able to accuse you of preoccupation with money. Nothing alienates souls from a priest more than the impression of dealing with a *money man*. Do not worry about money. You will never lack it for your work if you know

7. *Luke 18: 24 - 25.*

8. *Pliny Bk IX, XXX p.249.*

how to give generously. It can be said without any attempt at paradox: Money will come to you in the measure in which you do not go after it. Think often of the versicle from Ecclesiasticus which the Church has us say in the Office of Confessors: *Happy the man found without fault, and who has not turned aside after gold, nor has he placed his hope in money and in riches. Who is he, that we may praise him? For in his life he has done wonders.* If we look at the modern world, we observe the search for comfort and well being; the desire to eliminate inconvenience, sickness and every obstacle. The world is dominated by the desire for *prosperity*.

Spirituality transfigures the material and materiality incarnates the spiritual. Crass matter dominates and corrupts religion. Such that the market price of religion is very high when matter is introduced. In other words, religion is presented as a solution to human problems, as a fulfilment of human needs. The different denominations and religions appeal to different segments of the population, depending on their perceived needs and problems. For Ovid has it that we are attracted by our own desires. The Pentecostal-type religions seem to draw people who are highly emotional and long for spiritual highs. The liturgical-type religions appeal more to people who love order and drama. The intellectual-type religions attract people who are looking for a cerebral faith. The prosperity-religions have great appeal to people who seek wealth and health. The fellowship-type religions draw people who are looking for an experience of community.

There is nothing particularly wrong or surprising about this market orientation in Nigerian religious life. Why shouldn't religion meet people's needs and answer their problems? What good would a religion be if it didn't do those things? That said, there is a real danger in presenting religion only as a solution to problems and an answer to questions.

Corruptio optimi, pessima. A bad man is worse when he pretends to be a saint(*Francis Bacon*). Religion has been used as a cloak for evil deeds throughout human history. That is why **Lucretius** in *De Rerum Natura* said:

*Religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta...
Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum⁹*

Demosthenes had once said, money we must have, for without it we cannot accomplish any of our desires. On the other hand, St. **Polycarp** seems to contradict him by saying that troubles of every kind stem from the love of money. Though people believe that problems could be solved by money. Their faith in the future rises and falls with the stock market. They depend on money to secure health and happiness. But money carries the reminder of its

9. *Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, Libri Sex 1,83,101:*

*Religion, has given birth to deeds sinful and unholy-----
Such evil deeds could religion prompt.*

own limitations. The motto *In God We Trust* is emblazoned on the U.S dollar - an ironic reminder that money cannot solve all problems.

To what end does greed not drive us? **Plutarch**, the Moralist, teaches a lesson in this story from his **Sayings of Kings and Commanders**:

Semiramis caused a great tomb to be prepared for herself, and on it this inscription: whatsoever king finds himself in need of money may break into this monument and take as much as he wishes. Darius accordingly broke into it, but found no money; he did, however, come upon another inscription reading as follows: if you were not a wicked man with an insatiate greed for money, you would not be disturbing the places where the dead are laid.

We are drawn by our desires. Even to invade tombs! We are permeated with materialistic and even narcissistic values: the materialism which creates a coldness in the heart and seems to relegate God to the edge of the universe. Matter chokes out our inner sources of strength. Its universal appeal ousts God. That **Juvenal** laments:

*Still it is wealth, not God, that
Compels our deepest reverence.¹⁰*

But, citing St. Robert **Bellarmino**, **Benedict XVI** in a weekly audience instructed that wealth, health and honour only serve a person if they lead to God. He went on to cite St. **Bellarmino**'s affirmation: *Whoever finds God finds everything, whoever loses God loses everything*. Henry **Fielding** cautions: if you make money your god, it will plague you like the devil. Fixation on possession is destructive of relationship. In fact, greed breaks the commandment: *you shall have no other gods before me*. We are not owners but administrators of the goods we possess. It is the most serious spiritual problem of our time. It is an infectious disease that touches all of us and will destroy a vast number of us. It has a narcotic quality. Poverty wants many things but avarice everything. More is never enough. For greedy spirits nothing moves fast enough. Because *as wealth grows, worry grows, and thirst for more wealth*, declares **Horace** in *Odes* 3. The Romans had a proverb which said that money was like sea-water; the more a man drank the thirstier he became.¹¹

¹⁰ *Juvenal, Satire 1.*

¹¹ *Barclay William, Luke 12: 13-21*

Antidote to greed is Gratitude. Appreciate and you prosper! We draw unto ourselves the good of whatever we appreciate. For he who enjoys without thanksgiving is as though he robbed God. A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue but the parent of all other virtues, **Cicero** teaches. A primary factor in the divine law of increase is gratitude, without that, we will never have enough. But with it, we will always be rich. It produces a gracious approach to life. Citing the stoic philosopher **Seneca**, we should give as we would receive, cheerfully, quickly and without hesitation; for there is no grace in a benefit that sticks to the fingers.

ENVY (INVIDIA)

***The green eyed monster that
feeds not its own.
– Shakespeare.***

It is readily confessed. It is nastiest, the most grim, the meanest, sneering, sly, vicious. The face of envy is never lovely. If the fact that X writes so well, and that V has the best editions of all the classics, makes me belittle myself and my condition, and so wish to pull X and V down. I feel envy. This is a canker. Envy is *natural to man* (**Herodotus**). It is one of the sparks that *set all on fire* (**Dante**). It is rooted in the human heart, (**Sheridan**). We must be on guard against it in ourselves. Like fire, it always makes for the highest points.¹² That is why it is said that another's fatness makes the envious lean. Envy follows closely upon the heels of distinction.¹³

One of its symptoms is dejection. The envious are filled from day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute, with a bitter regret for what they cannot have or be. Envy must always try to level what it cannot emulate. It leads us to back bite, spite, malign and accuse. To take away someone's good name is second only to murder as an offense against them. It is itself a way of destroying them. The envious person is moved first and last, by his own lack of self-esteem, which is all the more tormenting because it springs from an inordinate self-love. The envious man does not love himself, although he begins with self-love. He is not grateful for, or happy in, what he has. The sin is deadly, less because it destroys him, than because it will not let him live. His disparagement of others is a reflection of his disparagement of himself. He regards himself as much of malice as he regards them. Envy is evil-minded, spiteful and given to calumny, excited to an undue curiosity about the affairs of other people. It must justify its self-torture. Envy is a source of discord. It is a sower of strife, between colleagues, between neighbours, even between friends, and here it is close to Pride. It is also the source of murmuring.

12. *Livy, Histories VIII, 31*

13. *Invidia gloriae comes est..*

The correction of envy is our love of God. Our word for love is now therapy. Our word for charitableness now, is message. If all the sins are a hardening of the heart, envy is also a bitterness of the heart – not only about others’ success but also their virtues.

ANGER (IRA)

***Let white-robed peace be man’s divinity;
rage and ferocity are of the beast.***

- Ovid, De Arte Amandi.

Anger is adept with menace and accusation. There can never be any doubt that as fear involves flight, anger involves assault. Our voices rise. Our eyes blaze. Our words are hurled out. Our bodies stiffen. Our fingers point. Our feet stamp. As a deadly sin, it is *a disorderly outburst of emotion connected with the inordinate desire for revenge*. Anger so clouds the mind that it cannot perceive the truth, declares Dionysius **Cato**. It is a burning in us like a banked fire. We think of it in terms of fire: blazing, flaming, scorching, smoking, fuming, spitting, smoldering, heated, white-hot, simmering, boiling. How great a blessing to escape anger, the greatest of all ills, and along with it madness, ferocity, cruelty, rage, and the other passions that attend anger!¹⁴ And so **Euripides** advises: *refrain from wrath, advantaged shalt thou be.*¹⁵

There are angry people, who seem simply to be angry, within themselves, at anything and everything, angry at life, angry at their lot, angry at the world, angry at everyone else, angry at themselves. These are people of wrath, sustained and vengeful. We live in an age of wrath: the terrorist, the kidnapper, the hijacker, the looter, and the clenched fist demonstrator. They are angry. Ferocious claims for rights; women’s rights; students’ rights; gay rights etc. They are angry. Priests’ rights. **Seneca**, in De Ira, I, inquires whether anger is in accordance with nature. In this inquiry, he turns his eyes to man.

*Man is born for mutual help; anger for mutual destruction.
The one desires union, the other disunion; the one to help, the
other to harm; one would succour even strangers, the other
attack its best beloved; the one is ready even to expend himself
for the good of others, the other to plunge into peril only if it
can drag others along. Who, therefore, has less knowledge of
the ways of Nature than the man who would ascribe to her
best and most finished work this cruel and deadly vice? Anger,
as I have said, is bent on punishment, and that such a desire*

14. Seneca, De Ira: *Quantum est effugere maximum malum, iram, et cum illa rabiem, saevitiam, crudelitatem, furorem, alios comites eius.*

15. Euripides, Medea 615.

*should find a harbour in man's most peaceful breast accords least of all with his nature. For human life is founded on kindness and concord, and is bound into an alliance for common help, not by terror, but by mutual love.*¹⁶

Thus, Ovid concludes: fair peace is becoming to men, fierce anger to beasts^{16a}.

One of the consequences of Anger that is condemned is the habit of foul language and blasphemy: We have only to listen with our ears to hear the wrath of our age everywhere. We priests are apt, I think, to be too brusque, too hectoring, in our dealings with the faithful; there is too much of the drill-sergeant about us. Talking down on people. Upstairs – downstairs syndrome. Scolding in the confessional. This means six souls lost for one saved. The worst possible scene of clerical ill-temper is the pulpit. If you go up there with nothing prepared all your grievances come out with a rush and a roar.

Probable correction is meekness. This virtue of meekness is important for all those who have to deal with men, but especially for the priest who has the care of souls. Whoever has to perform a delicate task cannot proceed as a *Jupiter tonans*. His words and his whole behaviour must be free from all violence. We are exhorted, therefore, to

*refrain from anger, whether he be an equal or a superior or an inferior, who provokes its power. A contest with one's equal is hazardous, with a superior mad, with an inferior degrading.*¹⁷

Horace, thereby, admonishes:

*Anger is short-lived madness. Rule your passion, for unless it obeys, it gives commands. Check it with bridle – check it, I pray you, with chains.*¹⁸

16. Seneca, De Ira, 1.

16a. Ovid, De Arte Amatoriae, III, 502: Candida pax homines, trux decet ira feras.

17. Seneca, De Ira: *Ergo ira abstinendum est, siue par est qui lacessendus est siue superiore siue inferiore. Cum pare contendere anceps est, cum superiore furiosum, cum inferiore sordidum.*

18. Horace, Ep. 1.2, 62: Ira furor brevis est: animum rege;

qui nisi paret imperat;

hunc frenis, hunc tu compesce catena.

**Beauty has seduced you;
Lust has subverted your conscience
– Dan. 12:56.**

We live in a sex-oriented age, a world under sex revolution on rampage. It is a revolution that moves like an avalanche, sweeping the high and low. Sex is considered an open sesame to happiness and social advancement. Shakespeare graphically puts this force in these terms:

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame is lust in action; and till action, lust is perjur'd, murderous, bloody, full of blame, Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust; enjoy'd no sooner, but despised straight; Past reason hunted; and no sooner had, Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait, on purpose laid to make the taker mad: mad in pursuit, and in possession so; had, having, and in quest to have, extreme; a bliss is proof-and prov'd, a very woe; before, a joy propos'd; behind, a dream. All this the world well knows; yet none knows well to shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.¹⁹

Father Raniero **Cantalamessa**, the Pontifical Household Preacher, in his *First Lenten Sermon 2011*, talked about the two faces of love: **Eros** and **Agape**. He opines that in the world we find **eros** without **agape**; among believers we often find **agape** without **eros**. Eros without agape is a romantic love, very often passionate to the point of violence. A love of conquest which fatally reduces the other to an object of one's pleasure and ignores every dimension of sacrifice, of fidelity and of gift of self. **Agape** without **eros** seems to us a *cold love*, a loving *with the tip of the hairs* without the participation of the whole being. If worldly love is a body without a soul, religious love practised that way is a soul without a body.

Lust is charmless. It is charmless with what should have most charm. Love is involvement as well as continuance but Lust will not get involved. Lust dries up human beings, it also dries up human relationships. It is a dried-up, stale, uninterested, lethargic, mechanical, unfeeling, uninvolved, unrewarding, tedious, boring, let's-get-it-over-with, tomorrow-less, dull, empty, self-emptying sex. The word for lust is *parched*. Lust is not a sin *of* the flesh so much as a sin *against it*. Lust is always in pursuit and ends as empty-handed as it began. Thus Sappho describes it as *a monster bittersweet and my unmaking*.^{19a}

¹⁹. Shakespeare, Sonnet 129.

^{19a}. Sappho: Poems and Fragments.

Some of the evils to which lust gives rise are:

*blindness of intellect in respect of divine things;
precipitancy in acting without judgment;
want of regard for what befits one's state or person;
inconstancy in good;
hatred of God as an Avenger of such sins;
love of this world and its pleasures;
inordinate fear of death.*

Lust is a capital vice, because the carnal pleasure of which we are speaking is so attractive to the majority of mankind that man is led into all kinds of disorders, in order to gratify his fleshly desires, which of us will deny it? We are all innocent without a witness, concludes Juvenal.

GLUTTONY (GULA)

*Like mice they lived, on victuals not their own,
And never were in gluttony exceeded.²⁰*

Gluttony does not give a particular value to anything it consumes. It does not savour. It only devours. It sees no beauty in food. He eats, and would not even say grace before meal. We can be gluttons for punishment. We can be gluttons for work. We can be gluttons for youthfulness, for life. Our age is gluttonous for drugs. We can be gluttons for drink. Pope **Gregory the Great** and later reiterated by St. Thomas mentioned that the manners in which gluttony can be committed, are eating too soon, eating too expensively, eating too much, eating too eagerly, eating too daintily, and eating wildly and not exercising.

Gluttony is a sin of ingratitude. It is more painful than a serpent's bite. Ingratitude is one of the most mean-minded consequences of self-love. It makes life charmless. Tedium is an effect of gluttony. The glutton does not just lapse into torpor at the moment of his gross satiation; his life is itself one of torpor from which his indulgence is an escape. Gluttony is a grievous sin if it induces us to find all our contentment in the gratifying of our appetites.

SLOTH (ACEDIA)

Be not idle, idleness is a distressing thing.

– Pittacus.

It is a sin which the New Testament again and again most unsparingly condemns. It is a deadly sin because it is *an oppressive sorrow that so weighs upon a man's mind that he wants not to exercise any virtue*. It is the decision not to fulfil a significant part of one's

20. Plautus, *Persa*, Act 1, Sc. 11: *Quasi mures, semper edere alienum eibum*

Neque edacitate eos quisquam poterat vincere

responsibilities. In pathology, sloth means a morbid inertia and by transference, it means the same spiritually. It is the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die.

Sloth has been described in theology

as a hatred of all spiritual things which entail effort, and faintheartedness in matters of difficulty in striving for perfection.

It will *endure no hardship nor any penance*, says the **Parson** in his Tale in **Pilgrims' Progress of Chaucer**.

Are you an energetic correspondent? Sloth or idleness, with most of us, does not mean lying in bed and doing nothing: it means giving priority always to the things which interest us and leaving our other duties to queue up and take their turn if they ever get a turn. *Hesiod* sums it up: *No toil can shame thee; idleness is shame. Hunger's the faithful companion of the idle.*²¹

Watch sloth! It can become a sort of creeping paralysis, which can infect even our priestly duties in the end. And an idle priest puts out a light in God's Church. Sloth eats at us. It is pre-eminently a sin of omission. To put it more positively, it is a sin of neglect. We neglect what we ought to do, and especially we neglect our neighbours. We procrastinate with sick-calls. This neglect may amount even to callousness. Mind one's own business; do not get involved; live and let live. In this way, we will not hurt, and not be hurt. It separates us from the rest of humanity and so, from our own humanity. It separates us from God. There is no room for concern or caring in it.

CCC asserts that *acedia* or spiritual sloth goes so far as to refuse the joy that comes from God and to be repelled by divine goodness²² St. Thomas calls it a torpor in the presence of spiritual good which is divine good. But in separating us from everything that is other than us, it separates us from much of what is essentially us. Leaving us feckless, we become more feckless. And what is most terrible about it, is that, even in our sloth, we move across our landscape, like a cloud of locusts, devouring everything by doing nothing: seeing nothing, hearing nothing, telling nothing.

I would like to conclude these thoughts, which I affectionately entrust to your meditation. May **Mary**, Mother of Priests sustain us with her constant protection along the path of our ministry, especially when the road becomes difficult and the work weighs more heavily upon us. May the Sinless Mother intercede with her Son that we may never lack the courage in our struggle with sin which our weaknesses have forged to enchain us.

21. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 311.

22. CCC no. 2094.

In the joy of the immense graces we have all received this day, I embrace you all and give you my blessings.

Delivered in Christ the King Cathedral, this 21st Day of April in the Year of the Lord, 2011.

+Vincent Valentine **Ezeonyia**, C.S.Sp.
Catholic Bishop of **Aba**.