

Lent Series '17
Third Sunday of Lent, Yr A
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Seven Deadly Sins: Gluttony & Lust
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In our Lenten review of the seven deadly sins, we have covered pride, envy, and greed – disorders in our psychological needs for status and security. Today we consider two disorders of bodily appetites, gluttony and lust. Food and sex are created by God for a purpose, and are good within that purpose, but disordered and destructive outside that purpose.

Let's do gluttony first. We all need to eat and drink. Question is, do we eat to live, or live to eat? Gluttony is usually thought of as eating too much, to the point of pain and getting sick. But there are other ways of abusing food. I remember an evening in the seminary amusing ourselves by guessing which of our classmates would be the first to become a pastor, the first to be a bishop, and then someone asked who would be the first to die. The answer was prompt and unanimous-- our friend who chain-smoked unfiltered Larks, drank diet Tab by the liter, ate cheese by the pound, and refused to eat anything green. Sorry to say, we were right about him, God rest his soul. It wasn't how much he ate, but what he ate.

At the opposite extreme are those who will eat only the best quality, most expensive, exquisitely prepared food. More extreme yet are those who binge between eating and fasting. We don't think of anorexia as being a form of gluttony, but it is a disordered use of food.

Christ was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. By this his enemies meant that he went to dinner parties and wedding receptions. But eating big at such social functions is not gluttony, its respecting the demands of hospitality. I remember as a young priest going with the pastor to a parishioners' home for dinner. All went well until the pastor, always on a diet, refused desert. The husband got very irate at what he saw as an insult to his wife. Awkward moment! To tide things over I graciously ate the pastor's pie as well as my own. I do what I can. I ate twice as much pie, but which of us was exaggerating the importance of food?

As a rule, Christ was not very concerned about his food. “Do not worry about what you are to eat or what your are to drink,” he told his disciples. And when they returned from the Samaritan town with provisions and urged him to eat, he replied, “My food is to do the will of the One who sent me.”

That put in perspective the physical food that he did then proceed to eat. Its okay to enjoy your food, but eat to live, not live to eat.

Well, enough about gluttony. What about lust? Lust is a disorder of the sexual appetite, an appetite that is good when kept within God's benevolent purposes. God created humanity male and female, complementary partners in a one flesh union we call marriage. This life partnership of love and trust in good for husband and wife and good for their children. One can understand, then, why something so vital to human happiness is also pleasurable. If spinach was so pleasant no one would have to be told to eat their vegetables! But the pleasure is a motivator, not the primary purpose. Physical intimacy fulfills its purpose when it expresses and cements personal intimacy, and when it welcomes the little ones who are summoned into existence. If the pleasure by itself is made the first and only purpose, sacrificing love and life, it is lust, a disorder of what God has ordered a turning of values upside down.

But you hear people say, “The Church should stay out of the bedroom”, or “Keep your theology off my biology”. These clever little slogans imply that we rein as gods over our bodies, but if the Creator made us, our bodies, and our sexuality, then we do not have absolute rights over our own bodies; and it should not surprise that He provides directions for their proper use. The more beautiful the gift when used properly, the more ugly and destructive it is when abused. And lust is an abuse of sexuality, leading to a host of other evils – loneliness, cynicism, self-hatred, adultery, abuse, abortion, divorce, rape, etc. A picture of our own times.

Sad and tragic is the result when a gift meant for our happiness becomes, through misuse, the occasion of our ruin instead.

The Samaritan woman at the well was sad and tragic. She had been through five men and was living with number six, we aren't told why. But when she went into town after meeting Jesus, she said “Come meet a man who told me everything I have done.” “Everything I have done” implies some responsibility for what she's been through. All those broken love relationships, if they were love, didn't just happen to her.

Notice how Jesus treated her. He ignored social convention by even speaking with her. He was tired and thirsty but took the time to follow her through her conversational evasions. He was kind and patient but quite directly pointed out the problem, the cause of her sadness. She, through misusing God's gifts, had contributed to the destruction of community rather than creating it. With great compassion Christ invited her to the living water, the Holy Spirit, who alone could heal and restore her.

Healing is a good word for what's needed, because most people guilty of gluttony or lust

are trapped by it. To the extent they choose to remain in it they sin, and need to repent and reform. But to the extent they are addicted, they need to be healed and restored. Lust has become such a problem-- 30% of all internet traffic is pornography-- that even the secular world has noticed and offers treatment for sex addiction. There are also Catholic resources and counselors who provide not just helpful techniques for controlling lust but also a compelling vision of how all creation, including human sexuality, exists as an integrated whole, created by a loving God for the sake of our happiness.

John Paul II's "Theology of the Body" is a good place to start. If you missed our parish mission, don't worry. Bill Donaghy, our presenter, has emailed the parish his power point slides and videos, and we are working on ways to make them available to everyone in the parish. If you don't think you need it yourself, you know someone else who does.

Our decadent, overly-sexualized culture has burned many lives. Christ offers a spring of living water to heal and refresh, welling up to eternal life. Come and drink.