

Conference II: Obstacles that Rob Us

Saint Ignatius of Loyola: "There are very few people who realize what God could make of them if they abandoned themselves into His hands, and let themselves be formed by His grace."

The first question raised in Sacred Scripture speaks to the fragmenting condition to which Christ came as our only remedy. The first question spoken by God Himself to the hiding, fallen, and shamed Adam: "**Where are you?**" (Genesis 3:9)

Where are you?

When we hide – from God, from others, from ourselves – we lose our focus, direction, we lack our true identity, we lack purpose in life, direction; we can falter, we fall, we betray, we perish (cf. Hosea 4:6) . . . or, we just seek to manage life!

Relationship ⇔ Identity ⇔ Mission = "Who I am" which mutually flows into "What I do." My actions flow from my fundamental identity.

So what contributes to such a condition? Why do I battle with sin(s) that just won't go away? Why do I struggle with myself, my defects, with God? Shouldn't Christianity be easier? After all, Christ finished the job for me on the cross, right? The answers my surprise you. And, such questions require transparent honesty and perseverance. Are you ready?

I would like to propose two answers about our condition that are so basic that we may overlook their effects in our lives. One is that we do not fully decide to follow God because we only surrender ourselves by degrees (Saint Theresa of Avila). The other is that we fear being loved too much by God. We fear losing ourselves in His love. We fear loving God too much. Why? Because we fear what He may ask of us, and from us!

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The lack of trust, that God will provide, produces fear and anxiety, so we carefully surrender little by little. We often then rely, by default, on our own strengths, our known gifts, our old ways, our old gods. We hear the lies inflicted by unhealed wounds. We construct vows, many times unknowingly, to manage the lies to protect our hearts. And, when exhausted by all our efforts and facing our limitations and deficits, we doubt, and grasp to fill ourselves, often falling into sin and superficial diversions, and habits of life that leave us dissatisfied, drifting, without vision, and on the surface of life. Where is the power of God? Is this all there is to life?

To break us out of our numbed inertia, our gray paralysis, in which our nature can tend, we domesticate our dreams and bury the true, deep desires of our heart in which sin and other false promises poise themselves as the *only* solution for one to feel alive once more.

We must no longer hide from ourselves, and even from God – no longer relating to God in fear as adolescents but as maturing adult disciples standing firm in love with the Living God! Let Christ be Lord and Savior and plant His cross in our all too many weaknesses and false consolations! For we are called to greatness in all our potential drawn by His grace!

Yet questions remain: What holds us back? Contained? Domesticated? Chasing empty promises to feel alive once more? Why am I a stranger to myself and to the deep desires of my heart? Why am I unhappy? We do I feel unfree?



Our world supersedes, microwaves, texts, instant messages . . . and eventually all this constant stimulation leaves us . . . flat, deflated, listless, self-indulgent, agitated, hyped, and superficial! We live on the surface of life and of God's promise. And, we wonder why we are bored! There is little room left for God and even our heart, drowned out and choked by the deafening noise and activities of life lived on the surface, . . . but the hunger for God does not go away. *Our hearts still desire the "more," . . .*

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more of what is truly real, and satisfying, and engaging. A practicing, and maturing Catholic, abides in the real, and aided by the clarity of grace that reveals and confronts what seeks to rob us:

1. [REDACTED] – often provoked by fears and/or rooted in one of the core wounds that afflict us.

Romans 7: 15,17,19: “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.”

Galatians 5: 16-24, especially verse 17: “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would.”

Saint Julian of Norwich: “When God sees sin He sees pain in us.”

Hebrews 12: 1b-2: “Let us lay aside every encumbrance of sin which clings to us and persevere in running the race which lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith. For the sake of the joy which lay before him he endured the cross, heedless of its shame.”

2. [REDACTED] – focus on establishing ourselves as the man/woman I should be/desire to be versus perfecting the true core/person who I am. Such activity is tied up with establishing my own identity and self-worth versus letting God the Father impart our identity and self-worth in Him (cf. **1 Peter 5: 9-10**). We desire to fix ourselves versus letting God reveal and heal us by abiding in communion with Him.

One can more easily understand the Fathers when we *move or mature beyond a solitary, fixated image of holiness as perfectionism and/or remain preoccupied with our own*

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imperfections . . . we need to encounter "ecstasis," a going out of self into a revitalized relationship with the Holy Trinity.

3. [REDACTED] – control seeking for approval/affirmation; often developed as "vows" in which we seek to manage and avoid/silence our wounds – those places where we are not free and resist God -- and its accompanying lies (cf. negative logismoi).

In practice, when one consents to the passions, he/she forms supposed coping mechanisms, or habits of living, vows as an emotional defense or protective need that can easily mutate into compulsions and addictions . . . forming a condition of attachments with various degrees of severity.

It is not ironic that the Greek word for "passion" is the basis for the English word "pathetic." When we are ruled by our passions (sins), we live, to some degree, pathetic lives. Such a condition is NOT of God!

4. [REDACTED] – unsolicited lies that present themselves to us to deflate us, keep us unhealed, and our wounds festering. Thereby, we are not a serious threat to the demonic (cf. Luke 4: 1-13)

The Eight Evil Thoughts: Pride, Vainglory, Acedia (Sloth), Anger, Sadness, Gluttony, Lust & Avarice [REDACTED]

Unsolicited *thoughts*, permitted to remain, form into *feelings*; feelings attended to coalesce into *desires*; desires evolve and arouse the *passions*; and the passions aroused lead to a question to the soul: *will you consent?* (cf. Funk, *Tools Matter*, p. 6)

In practice, when one consents to the passions, he/she forms supposed coping mechanisms, or habits of living, to meet an emotional defense or need that can easily mutate into compulsions and/or addictions . . . limiting one's potentiality and identity, and forming a condition of attachments with various degrees of severity.

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It is not ironic that the Greek word for “passion” is the basis for the English word “pathetic!”

Way to Master Thoughts: “The way to master thoughts is to notice them early, often, and consistently, and respond to them deliberately.” (cf. Funk, *Tools Matter*, p. 7, emphasis mine)

2 Cor. 10:5: “. . . take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

5. **Idolatry** – inordinate attachment, or quantity, or lack of prudential judgment in the use of things, and/or attentive *preoccupation* with things . . . based upon and informed by a materialist philosophy of life – where only this life and material things are real and can make us happy. While we swim in this cultural pool, and can absorb some of its viewpoints, this philosophy is NOT a Christian view of reality. It is NOT complete.

The alternative is clear: either we govern our passions and find peace, or we let ourselves be dominated, governed, and enslaved by them. To some degree, we remain in bondage, unhealed, and abandon our deeper desires and purpose in life. We settle and are numbed. We look, at times frantically, for fulfillment outside ourselves and create our own identity, instead of encountering more fully the adventure within the interior life (confronting the human person as body and soul) where God, will restore, strengthen, confirm, and establish us. What an unhappy life, unsettled and searching. Where is the legacy?

The *aim of the demonic*, knowing one’s susceptibility to certain weaknesses, seeks, through a suggestion or thought, to stir the passions (the eight evil thoughts) to cloud our intellect, and weaken the will to give permission for one to enter into sin, and enslave our humanity, keeping one bound and unhealed, diminishing our human dignity and our call to *theosis of communion with the Holy Trinity*.

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Romans 6:12-14: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God . . ."

While psychology can help us identify and manage the condition in which we find ourselves, only Grace can truly and fully heal us!

Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*: "Healing is an essential dimension of the apostolic mission and of Christianity. When understood at a sufficiently deep level, this expresses the entire content of redemption." (emphasis mine)

Lessons Concerning Obstacles in the Spiritual Life:

- ◆ Wounds were inflicted (frequently) apart from our choice. Sin is an act of self-infliction, while a wound is inflicted by sinful acts of others (whether directly intended or not)
- ◆ Sin not only causes wounds, it also grows out of wounds.
- ◆ Unconfessed sins and unhealed wounds can be malignant spiritual strongholds in our lives.
- ◆ Wounds are a reflection of past experiences where we feel (and many times unknowingly permit ourselves to be) disconnected from God.
- ◆ We often sin as a way of trying to escape the suffering caused by the wound.
- ◆ God permits desolations in order to bring to the surface of our attention areas of unhealed wounds so that we can offer them to His grace from healing. *God does not cause, but permits, desolations:* to heal our faults, for spiritual learning, to grow in gratitude (humility).

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◆ We need to examine the area of sin patterns in our lives and see behind the sin to the wound that is giving power, or the motivating force, to the sin.

Core wounds: Real, or imagined, experiences in the development of a child – can be inflicted knowingly, but often unknowingly from parents, particularly the father, while siblings and/or peers' actions can confirm the wound. **Robert Schuchts, PhD, Theology of the Body Healing & Training Center, Tallahassee, FL (cf. *Be Healed* by Robert Schuchts)**

Each of the wounds speaks with different lies believed (negative logismoi) and vows made which are tailored to keep us bound/unhealed.

- What do you believe in your heart about yourself? (“Lies”)
- What do you believe in your heart about other(s)? (“judgments”)
- How have you managed the lies/judgments or sought to silence them? (“vows”)

⇒ Acknowledge, relate them to God, receive His grace/inspiration, respond

⇒ Take authority over negative logismoi in the name of Jesus

- a. **Wound of Invisibility** (actions of self-concealment or overplaying to one's strengths) ... **Need for Attention**

- **Negative Awareness:** “I do not count”; “I am overlooked”
- **Lies Believed:** “I am not important”; “I have no value”; “I am not desired”
- **Vows Made:** I will never let myself be rejected by anyone”; “I will meet everyone else's needs and please them so I will be liked and needed”

- b. **Wound of Isolation** (actions of self-indulgence/self-medication) ... **Need for Affection**

- **Negative Awareness:** “I am not connected”; “I am not loved”;
- **Lies Believed:** “I am all alone”; “No one understands or cares”

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● **Vows Made:** "I will never get close to anyone"; "I have to grasp for my needs"; "I will fill my emptiness with food, sex, drugs, and/or work, etc."

c. [REDACTED] (feelings of self-hatred) . . . **Need for Approval**

● **Negative Awareness:** "I am not competent"; "I am not good enough"

● **Lies Believed:** "I don't know what to do"; "I can't change it"; "I am a failure"; "I feel trapped"

● **Vows Made:** "I will prove myself"; "I will not fail"; "I will never show weakness, etc."

d. [REDACTED] (feelings of isolation) . . . **Need for Affirmation**

● **Negative Awareness:** "I have no courage"; "I will have to do it all myself"

● **Lies Believed:** "If I trust I will be hurt"; "Something bad will happen"

● **Vows Made:** "I will take all kinds of risks to show I am not afraid"; "I am not going to do anything to risk, because I will just get hurt (play it safe)"; "I will protect myself" (walls, control, etc.)

"This is indeed the hardest of all struggles; for while we strive against self, self is striving against us, and therefore is the victory here most glorious and precious in the sight of God." *The Spiritual Combat, Lorenzo Scupoli.*

In each of our dyings God sheds His light and love

"Sweeter are the uses of adversity" **Shakespeare**

1 Peter 5:6-10: "Humble yourselves, therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time He may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, establish, and strengthen you. To Him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (emphasis mine)

The Cloud of Unknowing: "He/she has no fear or error in believing that God is calling him, regardless of what sort of person he is now or has been in the past. It is not what you are nor what you have been that God sees with His all-merciful eyes, but what you desire to be."

The Eight Evil Thoughts: Negative Logismoi Addendum

Three categories of the Eight Evil Thoughts (Logismoi): (cf. *Tools Matter for Practicing the Spiritual Life* by Mary Margaret Funk, p. 7)

1. **Thoughts of the Body** → Gluttony, Lust & Avarice
2. **Thoughts of the Mind** → Anger & Sadness (Dejection)
3. **Thoughts of the Soul** → Pride, Vainglory & Acedia

1. **Pride** = an affliction of preoccupation with self; I am the source - (**idol** = self/self-sufficiency)
2. **Vainglory** = an affliction of preoccupation with what others think that governs what I do - (**idol** = others/their reaction determines self-acceptance)
3. **Anger** = an affliction to boil or stir up wrath . . . against one who has given injury, or is thought to have done so – (**idol** = preoccupied with control)
4. **Acedia** = an affliction of motivation and intention resulting in a lack of satisfaction and consolation in life or activities . . . a temptation to remain satisfied or discontinue the path of virtue – (**idol** = comfort/false freedom or license)
5. **Sadness/Dejection** = an affliction due to deprivation of one's desires or sensible pleasures (self-pity) – (**idol** = one's own fulfillment/wholeness)
6. **Gluttony** = an affliction to give up asceticism in the short order, even with small desires (to covet food, etc.) – (**idol** = food or drink) . . . 1 John 4:16
7. **Lust** = an affliction to lust (covet after bodies) – (**idol** = sex or relationships) . . . 1 John 4:16

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8. **Avarice (Greed)** = an affliction of concern, or shame, over potential future outlooks and worry over things (to covet things) – (**idol** = security, wealth, and health) . . . 1 John 4:16

In practice, the maladies of the soul are idols one is tempted to serve – a cheap substitute robbing the fulfillment of a legitimate human desire – whose effect is to cloud and weaken the faculties of the human soul, keep one bound and unhealed, and thereby limit one’s true freedom.

Christ Himself shows us the journey of the soul and the cure for the Eight Maladies: Baptism ⇒ Active Asceticism ⇒ Passive Asceticism ⇒ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God ⇒ Transfiguration

One can more easily understand the Fathers/Doctors of the Church when we move, or mature, beyond a solitary, fixated image of holiness as perfectionism and/or remain preoccupied with our own imperfections . . . we need to encounter “ecstatis,” a going out of self into a revitalized relationship with the Holy Trinity.

Thoughts = “inner thoughts or suggestions”

Sources of Logismoi (or Thoughts): *Three principle sources* sorted by the fruits they produce (cf. Funk, *Tools Matter*, p. 7)

1. From our own memories, desires, or past experiences
2. From God as inspirations of the Holy Spirit
3. From evil sources outside oneself

Discernment of Spirits may also be defined more broadly: such spirits as our fallen nature, our redeemed nature, another person who can lead us away or toward from God, angelic spirits, the Holy Trinity, the demonic, fallen creation, and the beauty of the created world.

Unsolicited **thoughts**, permitted to remain, form into **feelings**; feelings attended to coalesce into **desires**; desires evolve and arouse the **passions**;

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and the passions aroused lead to a question to the soul: *will you consent?*
(cf. Funk, *Tools Matter*, p. 6)

Example of logismoi from the life of Saint Augustine: “I was held back by mere trifles, the most paltry inanities, all my old attachments. They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, “Are you going to dismiss us? From this moment we shall never be with you again, forever and ever. From this moment you will never be allowed to do this thing or that, for evermore . . .” These voices . . . no longer barred my way, blatantly contradictory, but their mutterings seemed to reach me from behind, as though they were stealthily plucking at my back, trying to make me turn my head when I wanted to go forward. Yet in my state of indecision, they kept me from tearing myself away, from shaking myself free of them and leaping across the barrier to the other side, where you were calling me.”

“But by now . . . I had turned my eyes elsewhere, and while I stood trembling at the barrier, on the other side I could see the chaste beauty of Continnence in all her serene, unsullied joy, as she modestly beckoned me to cross over and to hesitate no more. She stretched out loving hands to welcome and embrace me, holding up a host of good examples to my sight. With her were countless boys and girls, great numbers of the young and people of all ages. . . . And in their midst was Continnence herself, not barren but a fruitful mother of children of joys born of you, O Lord, her spouse. She smiled at me to give me courage, as though she were saying, ‘Can you not do what these men and women do? Do you think they find the strength to do it in themselves and not in the Lord their God? . . . Why do you try to stand in your own strength and fail? Cast yourself upon God and have no fear. He will not shrink away and let you fall. Cast yourself upon him without fear, for he will welcome you and cure you of your ills.’”

(*Saint Augustine Confessions*, R.S. Pine-Coffin, pp. 175-176)

Way to Master Thoughts: “The way to master thoughts is to notice them early, often, and consistently, and respond to them deliberately.” (cf. Funk, *Tools Matter*, p. 7, emphasis mine)

Or, practice the Ignatian method of dealing with thoughts: Acknowledge, Relate (to God in prayer), Receive (insights and grace), and Respond (act upon the grace-filled inspirations).

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“Do not let the enemy seduce you by the suggestion: ‘Let go just for an hour.’ Very well, [you say,] just for an hour. But what will become of you, if you relinquish your life in God, and abandon yourself to the world and its comforts, and to bodily enjoyments? You will be a renegade from God; which is terrible for a single moment, let alone for an hour. And, is it likely to be but an hour? Is it not more probable that hour after hour will pass in this ungodly life, then day after day, and year after year? And beyond this, what? Even if the Lord takes pity on you and gives you time to come to yourself, to get free of this net of the devil and awake from your sinful sleep, you will still have to rejoin the same battle, from which you flee now to seek an easy life, with the only difference that then the fight will be incomparably harder, more acute, more painful, and, in addition, less successful. . . . [all for “just an hour”].” (*Unseen Warfare*, p. 115, as edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and revised by Theophan the Recluse)