

1

Studying Sin: Bad Reasons

- “Fear of the Lord” is a gift of the Holy Spirit. How does this differ from servile fear? Why is servile fear not a good motive for studying the vices?

- Father Nick Monco, O.P. says that we should not be hopeless because although God knows our sins, He still loves us so much that He came, died, and rose to free us from sin. This is the fundamental proclamation of the Gospel. Do you believe this is true for you—namely, that God loves you (1 John 4:19) and came to save you (John 3:16)?

- God first loved me, _____ and He came to save me, _____ .
(NAME) (NAME)

- What does this mean to you personally?

- There are four types of fear:

1. Worldly Fear: Love of the things of the world and fear of the loss of those goods
2. Servile Fear: Fear of punishment as the principle motive for avoiding sin
3. Initial Fear: Moving toward filial fear, while still influenced by a fear of punishment
4. Filial Fear: The gift of the Holy Spirit that makes one revere God and avoid sin out of love for Him

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

2

Studying Sin: Good Reasons

- Humility is knowing and accepting the truth about ourselves. How can humility, even about our sins, draw us closer to God?

- Identify an area of brokenness where Jesus may want to meet you. What would happen in your life if He were to heal that wound? Are you willing to let Him meet you there?

- Father Nick lists several reasons to study the deadly sins. Choose one of these reasons and pray about it—ask God to strengthen this motive and open your heart as you learn the vices. Write down what you hear Him saying to you.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

3

The Devil & Temptation

- Father Nick points out that our temptations can give us insight into our sins. What temptation have you faced most often recently? What sin or lack of virtue might this indicate (note that temptation itself is not sinful)? Is it difficult for you to admit your sins?

- Make a plan: What will you do the next time you encounter this temptation?

- Father suggests that God allows the devil to tempt us to help us grow spiritually stronger. Have you ever been faced with a strong temptation but chosen to do the right thing? How did you feel afterward?



We know prayer is powerful. Who will you turn to the next time you are being tempted or spiritually attacked? Write a prayer asking to be freed from a temptation with which you are presently struggling. Make it a simple prayer so that you can say this prayer each time this temptation arises.

Further Study: Watch Episode 17: Encounter Beauty from The Life of Christ Companion Series on Openlight Media Plus

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

4

Lust & Gluttony

- In The Divine Comedy, Dante (drawing on St. Thomas Aquinas) depicts lust as the least “bad” of the seven deadly sins. Does this surprise you? Why?

- “You can’t have a disordered desire for something that doesn’t have a good purpose in the first place.” Identify a specific disordered desire with which you have struggled in the past. What was the underlying good desire?

- What would be different if you were free to pursue this particular good desire in a perfectly temperate and virtuous way?



Place yourself in God’s presence and intentionally recite this prayer:

Heavenly Father, You surround me with good things. I ask for the grace to use Your gifts rightly, allowing You to control my desires for the things You put into my life.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

5

Understanding Lust & Gluttony

○ Consider the five “goods” of eating, drinking, and sexual activity that Father proposed:

- Physical pleasure
- Knowing and being known
- Giving yourself to another person
- Being loved and cared for
- Journeying together with others

○ Which of these “goods” resonates most with you?

○ Intemperance is the pursuit of sensible pleasures outside the order of right reason. It “impairs” one’s ability to recognize the good, the true, and the beautiful. Think of a time when you have been intemperate. How were you pursuing this good at that moment, albeit in a disordered way?

○ What are some virtuous and true ways to pursue that underlying desire?



Ask this question in prayer: “Jesus, in what ways do I need to grow so that my desires are directed toward the good?” Write down what you hear Him saying to you.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

6

Sex, Food, & Drink Disordered

- Father Nick lists many examples of how the goods of eating and drinking can be disordered and sinful. Which of these examples resonate with you? Have you struggled with gluttony in this way?

- What would a well-ordered version of eating or drinking look like in your life?

- Whether or not we have committed sins of lust, we can probably all recognize the truth of the examples Father gave of how disordered sexual activity impacts us, others, and society. Which example struck you most? How can living a life of chastity (faithful to the true purpose of sexual activity) change this problem for the better?



Write a prayer asking God to help you live a life of chastity.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

7

Lust, Gluttony, & Prayer

- Father Nick talks about the dangers of praying for the sake of having good feelings or of trying to recreate past good experiences. Ask the Lord in what new ways He wants to work in your life right now. Listen for His response. (It might give you the warm fuzzies – but it might not!)

- “If you’ve spent all night at a rock concert, it’s probably going to be hard to appreciate hearing the wind in the trees or the birds chirping the next morning.” Have you ever experienced the physical pleasures of lust and gluttony clouding your ability to enjoy peace or God’s quiet presence? When was a time when you’ve felt most able to “hear subtle beauty”?

- What does living the beatitude, “Blessed are the pure of heart” look like to you?

- What three ways did St. Augustine suggest to preserve one’s purity of heart?

1.

2.

3.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- Identify a temptation you've experienced recently. What did that temptation "say" to you to try to get you to give in? What does this tell you about your weak spot?

- Father Nick gives several suggestions for combating temptation, such as prayer, confession, fasting, seeking support, and avoiding near occasions of sin (by planning and making practical decisions). What are some concrete resolutions you can make towards overcoming temptation?

- What is the difference between joy and pleasure?

- "Man cannot live without joy. Therefore, someone who does not have genuine spiritual joys must resort to carnal pleasures." (St. Thomas Aquinas) What is a specific way to pursue authentic, genuine joy this week?

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- How does greed most manifest itself in your life—in a desire for comfort? Ostentation (showing off your wealth)? Security? Control of your time?

- When you encounter a poor person or a beggar, do you focus on their material needs or do you seek to see the person?

- Father Nick speaks about the tendency many of us have of zealously guarding our time. However, “man only finds himself in a sincere gift of himself” (Gaudium et Spes 24). Identify one way you can give a sincere gift of yourself this week.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- Take a few moments and humbly examine your life. Then, identify a few of your blessings—perhaps you have wealth, good health, talents, abilities, etc.

- How can you generously share these blessings? Be specific.

- Ultimately, greed (holding on to what is ours) doesn't make sense if we recognize that everything is a gift from God. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord for all the blessings He has given you.



Commit this week to spend time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, thanking Him for the blessings He has given you and asking Him to make you bold and generous in sharing them.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

11 Sloth or Acedia

- St. Thomas Aquinas's first definition for sloth is "sadness at the divine good," that is, sadness at encountering God's goodness in prayer. How is sloth a reversal of what prayer and contemplation ought to be?

- Father Nick lists a few reasons we might be uncomfortable in God's presence, like seeing our sin more clearly, knowing we need to renounce our (favorite) sin, or despairing of ever having union with God. Which of these most fits your experience of sloth in your life?

- St. Thomas Aquinas' second definition of sloth is "disgust with activity," especially in the "activity" of doing God's will. Why is this the natural overflow of "sadness at the divine good"?



Spend time in prayer this week and place yourself in the presence of the Lord. Sit quietly for a few minutes and then ask Him to reveal your sins to you and to enter into those places of sin...surrender them to Him. Listen to His voice and all He wishes to reveal to you. Allow yourself to feel His love being poured out upon you.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- “Fighting sloth does not mean faking joy or enthusiasm. It means choosing God.” Look ahead to the rest of your day. What is one concrete way you can “choose God” and His will today?

- What good things do you find yourself avoiding often? Ask yourself, “why?” How can recognizing this temptation help you?

- Similarly, do you find yourself “seeking compensations” when you are dissatisfied or bored? Do you tend towards being a couch potato or useless binge-watching? Write ways you “seek compensations” and then write positive ways to counteract this.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- Spend a few moments contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation, the fact that God became a man. How can the reality of this great mystery be a source of strength for you in combating sloth?

- Which of the remedies from the desert fathers most struck you? How can you practically implement that remedy the next time you battle acedia?

- Father Nick suggests offering God not just your love and your sufferings but also your happiness. What is one thing that happened today that made you happy? Did you invite God into that experience? If so, how?

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

14 Wrath

- St. Thomas Aquinas says that anger combines two passions: sorrow (at evil) and hope (that evil will be punished). Think of a time when you were angry. What was the cause of your sorrow? What did you hope would happen in response?

- While anger is not inherently sinful, it can be sinful if it is disproportionate. Still thinking of your example: Was your sadness appropriate? (Was an evil committed?) Was it proportionate (not excessive)?

- What about your “hope” for vengeance? Was it directed toward the wrongdoer, and was it within the limits of reason and justice? If not, what aspect of your anger was unjust and needed some reform?



Cultivating the virtue of self-control is a remedy to wrath. Recite this prayer for self-control:

Dear Jesus, Thank You for all the desires You have given me, because they remind me of the desire in my heart that only You can fill! Help me to control my tongue when I am supposed to be silent; my hands when I am supposed to keep them to myself; my eyes when I am supposed to be focused on a particular person or thing; and my ears to listen to only those things I am supposed to hear.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- Are you quick-tempered or slow to become angry? (There are pros and cons to both!) If quick-tempered, what strategies have you learned to help you assess a situation thoroughly before reacting in anger? If slow to anger, what can prod you to respond as called for in the face of real injustice?

- Think of a time when your anger turned to bitterness. In retrospect, is there something you could have done sooner to prevent the hurt from festering?

- Father Nick offers a great self-examination regarding evaluating your anger. Write down what he suggests you do to recognize whether your anger is just or sinful? Put this suggestion into practice the next time you are angry.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- “There but for the grace of God, go I.” Think of a time when you were excessively angry. Have you ever committed a sin that resembles the offense that made you so angry in some way? How could awareness of your sinfulness have changed your angry reaction at the time?

- Father Nick lists several things that forgiveness is not. Did any resonate with you? How can a distorted understanding of forgiveness paralyze our ability to forgive?

- Think of someone who has wronged you in some way, whether big or small. Have you forgiven them? If so, what helped you to be able to do so? If not, what is one concrete step you can take towards forgiveness?



Recite this prayer for meekness, asking God to give you the growth in this virtue.

Dear Jesus, please be King of my heart, especially when I am frustrated or angry. In those moments give me the grace to use all my emotions for the good.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

17 Envy

- Envy is “sorrow for our neighbor’s good”—the “sin of uncharitable competition.” How does envy differ from what is commonly called “jealousy” (desire for what someone else has)?

- Call to mind an envious experience—of resenting someone else’s success. What was at the root of that reaction – intimidation? Lack of confidence? Lack of generosity? Pride?

- Is there a particular situation or person that currently provokes you to envy? What is your usual reaction when the feeling of envy wells up within you?



One virtue that combats the vice of envy is charity which enables one to love as God loves. It sanctifies the human heart, enabling him to will the good of the other. One way to live this virtue is by performing works of mercy. Choose from the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy below and commit to performing one of these in the next two weeks.

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

- Give food to the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the sick
- Visit the imprisoned
- Bury the dead

SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

- Teaching the ignorant
- Counsel the doubtful
- Admonish the sinner
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Foregive offenses
- Comfort the sorrowful
- Pray For The Living & The Dead

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- Father Nick describes “spiritual envy” as sadness or resentment that another person seems to be experiencing greater gifts from God than you are. Why is this so particularly dangerous and damaging?

- Gratitude is a key remedy against envy. Think of and explicitly name at least five blessings you are grateful for in your life this week. Then keep going for as long as you can.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



Write a prayer of thanksgiving for one of the blessings you listed above.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- Vainglory is “the disordered desire to be thought well of by others.” Father distinguished this from the valid desire to be known and loved, comparing vainglory to “false advertising.” Can you think of a time when you have projected a false image of yourself to others? In response, were you more deeply known and loved for who you are?

- Signs of vainglory can include covering up mistakes (even by lying) and caring excessively about what others think. Examine yourself on these two points. How does this manifest in you?

- Father Nick states that to prevent ourselves from falling into vainglory, we need to avoid the trap of mistaking vainglory for real glory. The virtue of magnanimity, which means “greatness of soul,” is real glory based on humble truth. What is one of the greatest blessings God has given you? How can you humbly acknowledge that gift before others?

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

20 Four Types of Pride

- List four types of pride.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

- St Thomas Aquinas said, "Pride is a disordered desire for our own excellence." One prideful thing we can say is, "If I do everything right, things will work out for me." How is this a means of controlling? Do you struggle in this way?

- Father Nick gives many examples from his life of why he cannot consider himself a "self-made man." What are your examples? Who are the people who have contributed to who you are today?

- Give some honest consideration to the third and fourth kinds of pride: how you view the work of God's grace in your life and how you view the graces you've received in relation to others. Are there areas for repentance here? What are these types of pride the most dangerous?

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- Father says that “loving others can be healing for them because it shows them that they are lovable.” When have you most experienced being loved for who you are? What truth did that reveal to you, and what effect did it have?

- According to Father, pride and self-hatred can form a “horrible pendulum,” each one in response to the other. In what areas of your life does this cycle continue? What lie about yourself is fueling this?

- Obedience gives freedom in life and counteracts pride and the illusion of control. Is there an area in your life where you need to let go of control to obtain this freedom that God so freely gives? How can you be obedient to the Lord in this area?



Do you know someone who believes the “prideful lie” that they are not loved? If so, reach out to that person and let them know they are loved and why.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.



True humility is based upon the truth, and the fundamental truth of our existence is God's love. How convinced are you, in this moment, that the God of heaven and earth loves you? Ask the Lord to reveal His love to you more deeply. Write down what you hear Him saying to you.

- Most people find confession a humbling experience. Consequently, the temptation is to avoid it, but it is a perfect means if we desire to grow in humility. When was your last confession? What fruit have you experienced in the past from going to confession, perhaps even despite being reluctant to go?

- If you haven't been to confession in a while, commit to going. Write down when and where you will go.



Sit in silence for a moment and ask Jesus if there is an area in your life where you might need help growing in self-knowledge? Who is a trusted person you could ask for insight? Write down what He reveals to you and perhaps share this with a person you trust.



For the next week, spend time every night before you go to bed reflecting on the blessings in your life and thanking God for them.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

- Magnanimity is “greatness of soul”—and is a virtue! What is some good, even great, quality or gift that you think God would like for you? Have you asked Him for it? Do you believe He can accomplish it in you?

- Is there an area in your life where you are holding back from being fully alive in Christ, being the best you can be, out of false humility, laziness, or any other fault?



In the coming week, find one way you can give “greatly” of yourself and do it!

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.

24 Hope

- Father Nick defines hope as a desire for a good thing that you don't have that's hard to get but possible to get. Hope is the perfect love of self. The ultimate end of hope is heaven. What do you hope for in your life?

- Hope is not just about heaven, it's the means we need to get there; it's about God's grace. Father distinguishes hope from optimism and pessimism. Why does he say optimism can be bad? Do you lean toward optimism or pessimism?

- Hope thrives on expectation (which is not the same as a prediction!). Do you or have you fallen into the prediction mindset? If so, what can you do to change that?

- Think of the intentions nearest to your heart. Is there an intention for which you feel called to persevere in praying? What intentions do you need to surrender to God?



Write a prayer of surrender to the Lord.

Use this space for other thoughts and reflections.
