

Fr. Perozich comments —

In Maui I am not called upon much to supply for Mass, or for confessions outside of seasonal Penance services.

Right now in June 2019 I am back on the “madland = mainland” supplying in parishes, hearing lots of confessions in parishes led by faithful priests who make it available frequently and at times people can come.

*Most penitents truly are sorry. They are open to the instruction of the sin of **negligence** and virtue of **solicitude** in order to change their lives to holiness in God.*

Only a very few are so overcome by sin that they insist on justifying sin as a need in their life, taking no responsibility for action, rather shifting blame away from themselves.

*This article is very helpful to me to guide penitents to **solicitude** in their lives so that they do not sin, to repair the damage of sin, and to avoid sin in the future.*

Obviously it is very helpful to my own spiritual life also.

*The **bold** are my own highlighting of the article.*

*Michael Pakaluk presents the larger virtue of **Prudence** with the component lack of prudence, the sin of **negligence**, and the component exercise of prudence, the virtue of **solicitude**.*

*He notes that lack of diligence, preparation, oversight are common to **negligence**, which still is a sin although unintentional.*

“incipient sentimentalism: Don’t you see ... that I’m just upset by this as you are? ... sadness shows he’s not to blame, right?”

“It’s common to think that the only way we can separate ourselves from God is through some flagrant rejection of his will equivalent to cosmic criminality.”

“I didn’t mean to” fails in the end as a defense of one’s chosen way of life.”

“Do we show the same *solicitude* for holiness as we do for things we truly care about, in our profession, in our beloved avocations?”

“a consistent pattern of *negligence* can lead to a serious interior act of contempt of God.”

“I DIDN’T MEAN TO”

Michael Pakaluk

TUESDAY, MAY 28, 2019

“That was stupid. How much did it cost?” Yes, I had found my son’s dumb phone in the washer earlier that morning when I changed the laundry. I said nothing then. I simply perched it on the dryer. But now that he was fiddling with it at the breakfast table, looking morose and attempting to bring it back to life, I wanted to underline the point.

He replied, defending himself: “It’s not like I was *trying* to break it.” Ah, the old dodge, almost the first thing a child learns to say. A three-year-old says it was “an accident.” In a teenager, the same idea is mixed with incipient sentimentalism: *Don’t you see, Dad, that I’m just upset by this as you are?* His sadness shows he’s not to blame, right? He didn’t wish it. How cruel of me to ignore his suffering and even compound his pain!

I’m thinking to myself, *He’s almost a man. I need to teach him an important distinction.* “You must realize,” I said, “**that there are two ways we go wrong: deliberately, and through negligence.** By far, **most of the wrong that we do is through negligence.** That you didn’t mean to wreck your phone doesn’t mean you aren’t to blame.”

My son, a good kid, realized he was to blame. I knew he was going out for the day to earn money. And that what he would earn would just cover the price of a replacement phone. Understanding that **negligence is a sin contrary to the virtue of prudence**, I chose language which I realized would sting, but which was completely accurate and, I hoped, memorable: “Congratulations, then: you’re the fool who is going to work a day in the sun to replace his phone.”

Prudence has its challenges, but it lacks folly’s gnawing pain of regret.

(Oh yes, in the end my wife and I will likely pay for the phone. Strictness does not exclude compassion for a son or daughter's weakness. Not that I would let on to that in the moment.)

Alas, in that morning exchange I didn't have St. Thomas at my fingertips. He raises the question in *Summa Theologiae*, "Is **negligence** a separate sin?" (II-II, 54) It looks like it shouldn't be, because it is so bound up with almost every other sin.

But "**negligence**," the Master says, "**denotes lack of due solicitude**. Now every lack of a due act is sinful: wherefore it is evident that **negligence** is a sin, and that it must needs have the character of a special sin according as **solicitude** is the act of a special virtue. . . . Since then solicitude is a special act of reason. . . it follows that **negligence**, which denotes lack of **solicitude**, is a special sin."

What is this **solicitude**? It is that same as "watchfulness," and a special act of practical reason, included in the virtue of prudence. It denotes an absorbing keenness of attention on what needs to be done.



*

Some of us have items of such attention that fall to us in virtue of some office or responsibility we hold. Financial advisors must show “**due diligence**” as to risks; accountants as to fair presentation; physicians as to best practices of diagnosis and treatment.

But what about human beings, simply as such? Are there some things we are bound to be **solicitous** of, on pain of gross **negligence**, simply in relation to the creatures we are supposed to be? If so, then “I didn’t mean to” fails in the end as a defense of one’s chosen way of life. Or what about Christians, in virtue of their baptism?

It’s common to think that the only way we can separate ourselves from God is through some flagrant rejection of his will equivalent to cosmic criminality. Hypocrites, perhaps, too are at risk, because they impose on others a standard that they seem deliberately to spurn themselves.

But Our Lord was highly insistent on “**solicitude**”: “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.” (Mt 24:42) “To watch,” Pope St Gregory comments, “is to cast away the darkness of sloth and **negligence**.”

And, immediately after Our Lord says this, in Matthew’s Gospel, there come three parables specifically tailored to negligence.

- The foolish virgins (Mt. 25:1-13) don’t deliberately reject the bridegroom. They were **negligent** – they **neglected** to learn anything useful for salvation (Origen) or do the deeds of virtue, which spring from that (St. Jerome).
- The man who buried his talent in the ground didn’t throw it away or spend it badly: he simply **neglected** to make money with it (vv. 14-30). Says Origen: “The Lord did not allow that He was ‘a hard man’ as the servant supposed. But He assented to all his other words. He is indeed hard to those who abuse the mercy of God, who allow themselves to become **negligent**, and do not use God’s mercy, instead, to become converted.”

- As for the goats, they apparently have never deliberately harmed anyone. Clearly, they didn't "mean to" reject the Lord. (vv. 31-45) The sin that damns them forever would seem to be **negligence** of the hungry, thirsty, sick, etc.

Although **negligence** often involves small matters, it is the fault that commonly leads to a badly formed conscience. St. Thomas warns that a consistent pattern of **negligence** can lead to a serious interior act of contempt of God.

How do we know if we are **negligent** as regards the faith? Everyone is **solicitous** about something. Some spiritual writers counsel that we ask, as a starting point: **Do we show the same solicitude for holiness as we do for things we truly care about, in our profession, in our beloved avocations?**

"The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living" St. Pope John Paul II wrote in his **Apostolic Letter on the life of the Church in the new millennium**, which surely provides in this regard a good framework for self-examination.

***Image:** *Allegory of Negligence* by Joachim Beuckelaer, c. 1563
[Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp]

•
© 2019 *The Catholic Thing*. All rights reserved. For reprint rights, write to: info@frinstitute.org

The Catholic Thing is a forum for intelligent Catholic commentary. Opinions expressed by writers are solely their own.