

Fr. Perozich comments —

At a retreat for diocesan priests, Norbertine priest Fr. Thomas Nelson, O. Praem. told us that the mission of the diocesan priest is for the salvation of his own soul by saving others, while the mission of the monk was the monk's own salvation.

As a diocesan priest then, I reach out to you with this timely article by Fr. Derek Sakowski.

Draw back from the noise, confusion, unmooring of the faith in the church and world today with so many socialist, worldly themes, and take advantage of Fr. Derek Sakowski's guidance of a way to work out your salvation in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

As I read his article, I first tried to let go of my personal understanding of the language and allow his definitions to reform in my thoughts.

Then the foundation of the vices, the capital sins are presented.

After the list of capital sins are laid out, Fr. Sakowski expands the understanding of sin as not only the act of sin, but the impulse or tendency toward sin.

He shows how the emotions are triggered, used by us to condemn ourselves, and how Satan does the same in order to separate us from God and to isolate us from one another.

***Desires** are ordered to the good things that God has created for us. The **desires** need to be managed by us with God's grace in order that we attain what God is offering each person in God's own time. This takes patience and work.*

Our dignity and the struggle to discover and maintain that dignity then is laid out:

*“Each of us is created in the image and likeness of a God who is love – an eternal communion of persons in glorious relationship. We innately understand just how destructive our acting out becomes – and the devil is all too eager to bury us in **shame**. His endgame is to tear away as many of us as he can and get us to agree to never ending **isolation, misery, and torment.**”*

Fr. Sakowski shows us how to work out that salvation with this advice: “if we look deeply into our hearts at the places where we

*experience the most intense attack in the form of the seven capital sins, there we will find God's **glory** the most present."*

*Since the devil hates the **glory of God that shines in us**, Satan "use[s]the good and beautiful things God has created in an attempt to lie and steal and destroy"*

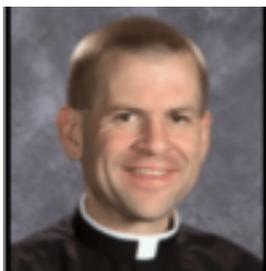
*"at the core of each of these seven capital sins in us, we find amazingly **good desires and needs** that God has placed in the human heart."*

"Whatever capital sins we find to be our "personal favorites" are also very likely the places we will find the deepest and holiest longings of our hearts –places in which our loving Father desires us to experience our true dignity, meaning, and purpose as his beloved children."

One concept that I have discovered is that every thought, word and deed, whether good or evil, ascends to God as my sacrifice. Either it is an unblemished sacrifice or a blemished one tainted by sin. Thus I try with God's grace to offer unblemished sacrifices to God.

As Fr. Sakowski says in the article thoughts of anger, lust, sloth, envy, and on will be present always within us. It is important to look into them without indulging them in order to discover the deepest and holiest longings of our heart, so that our hearts be healed to offer ourselves more and more as unblemished and glorious sacrifices to God.

Understanding "Capital Sins"



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We are all quite familiar with the **seven capital sins: pride, greed, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth**. Perhaps we learned about them in a classroom setting; certainly we have encountered them in ourselves and others!

Today, I would like to invite each of us to do something we normally don't do – to feel deeply the Father's kindness toward us in our weaknesses and our repeated tendency towards sin. Then, with Jesus, we can allow ourselves to be curious about these inclinations that we experience.

*As an accomplished sinner myself and as one who offers pastoral care to sinners, I find that we fallen humans tend to feel a great deal of **shame** and contempt around our weaknesses, our vulnerability to sin, and the details of our acting out. We tend to **despise** any part of ourselves that feels inclined to think or speak or act in one*

of these ways. Whether an inclination to numb out in slothfulness, to overeat, to compare ourselves with others and feel sadness, or to enter the realm of sexual fantasizing, we just wish that it would all go away. **Shame** *incites us to see the broken pieces of our heart as worthless garbage to be incinerated, rather than as bearing the image of God and beckoning us back to the heart of the Father.*

A deeper understanding of the capital sins – what they really are and why they are called “capital” in the first place – leads us to *seek traces of God’s goodness even in those places of our heart that feel totally beyond his reach.*

If we speak with greater accuracy, these seven impulses are not “sins” in the full and proper sense. They are tendencies or vulnerabilities in us. They are called “sins” because they come from sin and **incline** us toward sin. In Catholic theology, we speak of “**concupiscence**” as a wound in us, a strong inclination toward sinfulness that is part of the human experience as a result of the Fall of Adam and Eve. This wound of concupiscence is, of course, exacerbated by our own choices in life. *The more we sin, the more we want to sin.* **The seven capital sins can then be understood as seven different ways that fallen human beings experience a strong inclination toward sin.** We do not find it difficult to allow ourselves to indulge in any one of these seven inclinations. Jesus speaks about the wide gate and easy road that leads to destruction – in contrast to the narrow gate and difficult road that leads to life.

Indeed, we probably best know these tendencies as the “seven deadly sins” – because they easily become **toxic, harmful,** and deeply **destructive.** Unchecked, they **rupture** our relationships with God, others, and self, and ultimately lead toward death in every sense – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. *Each of us is created in the image and likeness of a God who is love – an eternal communion of persons in glorious relationship.* We innately understand just how destructive our acting out becomes – and *the devil is all too eager to bury us in **shame.** His endgame is to tear away as many of us as he can and get us to agree to never ending **isolation, misery, and torment.***

But why are these seven tendencies called “capital sins”? The word “capital” comes from the Latin *caput* – which means “head,” but can also mean “source.” John Cassian and Gregory the Great reflect on how each of these **impulses** becomes a source of sinfulness in us – not sins in and of themselves, but, if unchecked, strong **impulses** that lead us down the road of perdition.

The thing is, the devil cannot create. He is not God. *He can only use the good and beautiful things God has created in an attempt to lie and steal and destroy.* Ignatius of Loyola refers to the devil as “the enemy of human nature.” He absolutely despises us. He *hates the glory of God that shines in each of us.* That is where he attacks the hardest – which in a backwards way teaches us an important lesson: *if we look deeply into our hearts at the places where we experience the most intense attack in the form of the seven capital sins, there we will find God’s*

glory the most present. Why else would the devil attack us so intensely there?

In other words, at the core of each of these seven capital sins in us, we find amazingly **good desires and needs** that God has placed in the human heart. Yes, these seven tendencies can easily become sources of sinfulness that have great potential to lead us astray. But *they can also be deeply helpful clues to lead us back to God!*

That is where tender kindness, childlike wonder, and holy curiosity come in. Rather than shaming myself, *I can start noticing what is happening in my heart.* My **anger** is there whether I like it or not! Yes, I can allow it to *leak out in aggression* toward others or myself. But it can also be an invitation into the fullness of God's truth and justice, and an awakening of my prophetic identity in Christ. In my **envy** *I can notice the things my heart deeply aches for – often things the Lord deeply desires for me – but only if I am willing to allow myself to feel the heartache of longing and waiting.* In my **lust** *I can notice all kinds of desires and needs – to be desired and chosen, to be safe and secure, to be embraced, to be known and understood, or to be loved as I am, (notice that none of these is really about sex!).* In my **sloth** I may discover much less “laziness” and much more **shame and fear** – an urge to **hide** and **isolate** and turn away when *what I actually need is real relationships, in which I can be cared for precisely where I feel the weakest and most vulnerable.*

Whatever capital sins we find to be our “personal favorites” are also very likely the places we will find the deepest and holiest longings of

our hearts –places in which our loving Father desires us to experience our true dignity, meaning, and purpose as his beloved children.

Each of us can become “disciples” – yes, in the sense of discipline, but even more so by allowing Jesus to help us become **students** of our own heart, which is created in the image and likeness of God and declared by him to be “very good.” *If we open ourselves to that experience of authentic discipleship, the places of our deepest sorrow and struggle will become the very places that lead us back to the heart of the Father.*

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