CHAPTER 7 OF 11 · PREACHED NOVEMBER 8, 2026 · 32ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Sloth

Wisdom 6:12-16 · Psalm 63 · 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 · Matthew 25:1-13 (Wise and Foolish Virgins)



I The Teaching

In the Readings: Ten Lamps, Waiting

- Ten bridesmaids wait for a delayed bridegroom; five bring extra oil, five don't, and the five without it miss the feast entirely
- Nobody in this parable does anything wicked. That is exactly how sloth operates.

Nature

> *"Sloth is a sluggishness of the mind which neglects to begin good." (Aquinas, Summa II-II, Q. 35)*

- Tanquerey: sloth is "an inclination to idleness or at least to aimlessness, to apathy in action"; "a disease of the will, which fears effort and recoils from it."
- Tanquerey gives degrees: the indolent (does the task reluctantly and badly), the sluggard (delays and postpones indefinitely), and the truly lazy (a settled aversion to all real work); when it targets spiritual exercises specifically, he calls it spiritual sloth, "the foster-parent of lukewarmness"

Daughter Vices

Aquinas (Summa II-II, Q. 35, a. 4) derives sloth's daughters from the ways we flee from, or fight against, spiritual goods that feel burdensome.

- **Despair:** Fleeing the end itself: giving up on the hope of attaining God at all.
- **Faint-heartedness (pusillanimity):** Fleeing the arduous means: shrinking from the demanding goods we're invited to, the counsels, the "more", as simply too much for us.
- **Sluggishness regarding the commandments:** Fleeing even the ordinary means: torpor about what is plainly required.
- **Spite (rancor):** Fighting against the people who draw us toward spiritual goods: resentment of those whose goodness or encouragement reminds us of what we're avoiding.
- **Malice:** Fighting against the spiritual goods themselves: coming to detest the things of God precisely because they make demands.
- **Wandering of the mind toward unlawful things:** Flight into distraction: the soul that won't rest in God goes looking for pleasure elsewhere. Following Isidore, Aquinas names its forms, restlessness of mind, curiosity, loquacity, bodily restlessness, and instability.

In the Readings

- The foolish virgins embody sluggishness regarding the commandments: not refusal, just not bothering to prepare.
- Wandering of the mind is sloth's other face: when the harder good goes unattended, attention doesn't go blank, it goes somewhere easier.
- Modern acedia: curiosity and restlessness are the endless scroll, described seven centuries early.

Effects

> *"I passed by the field of the slothful man... and behold it was filled with nettles." (Proverbs 24:30–31, cited by Tanquerey)*

- Tanquerey: an idle mind and heart don't stay empty, they fill instead with "sensual, ambitious, proud, egotistical" thoughts; he even links Sodom's downfall in part to "fullness of bread and abundance and the idleness" (Ezekiel 16:49)
- The barren fig tree (Luke 13, Matthew 3:10) is his image for the stakes: a tree is judged not for doing evil, but for bearing no fruit at all

Remedies

- Tanquerey's first remedy is conviction: work, including the work of the interior life, is not optional for anyone, rich or poor, because we are each "laborers sent by God to work in His vineyard" (cf. Matthew 20:6-7, the same vineyard image running through this whole series)
- Practically: sustained, deliberate effort in training the will, since the slothful person instinctively shrinks from exactly the effort that would help
- From the habit-formation notes: since habits grow by repeated action and fade by the falling-off of it, the remedy for sloth is never a single burst of energy, it's one small, recommitted practice, repeated

The Wound Beneath the Sin

- Spiritual sloth and its daughter despair often grow from the wounds of hopelessness and powerlessness. The lie is "Nothing will ever change, so why try?" What looks like laziness from outside can be discouragement from inside.
- The truth to set against it: "hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts" (Rom 5:5). Hope is healed first; effort follows.

Living It Out in Ordinary Life

- Lukewarmness is spiritual sloth in its settled form (Tanquerey calls sloth its "foster-parent"). The signs of tepidity read like an examination of conscience: comfort-seeking, omitting the examen, not struggling on resolutions, rushing vocal prayers, placing conditions on our response (Forge 930; The Way 331).
- The Gospel's sleeping disciples: Peter asleep, then following "at a distance" (Lk 22:54); the enemy sowing weeds "while men were sleeping" (Mt 13:25). The sleeping bridesmaids belong in this company.
- The remedy is waking up: "it is full time now for you to wake from sleep" (Rom 13:11), and returning to the fervor of your first conversion (Rev 2:4-5).
- St. Augustine: "Totum exigit te, qui fecit te"; the One who made you asks for all of you.

- Using time well: “making the most of the time” (Eph 5:15-16); the heroic minute (The Way 251); diligence, not rushing (Forge 708).
- Prayer’s usual impediments, aridity, lack of time, distraction, are sloth’s cover stories. Fight them actively and use them as matter for prayer (The Way 90-92; Furrow 448).

Taking It Home

- The five who ran out of oil weren’t punished for malice: they were locked out for not being ready
- The invitation is real and it’s coming; the only sin available here is not showing up prepared to meet it

II Examination of Conscience

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit, help me to see my sins clearly, to be truly sorry for them, and to trust in your mercy. Amen.

How to read the ◆ GRAVE MATTER tag

A question with this tag concerns a serious matter. A sin is mortal only when grave matter is chosen with full knowledge and deliberate consent (Catechism 1857), and fear, habit or other factors can lessen responsibility. If you are unsure about anything, bring it to Confession and ask the priest.

Sloth itself

- [ ] Do I feel a heaviness or sadness toward the things of God: prayer, Mass, Scripture?
- [ ] ◆ GRAVE MATTER Have I deliberately refused the joy of God's love, turning away from Him in disgust or indifference? (CCC 2094)
- [ ] Have I put off prayer until "later," and later never came?
- [ ] Do I keep busy so that I never have to be quiet with God?

Despair and faint-heartedness

- [ ] ◆ GRAVE MATTER Have I given up hope of God's mercy or of my salvation? (CCC 2091)
- [ ] Have I decided that holiness, or the "more" God asks, is simply not for me?

Sluggishness about the commandments

- [ ] ◆ GRAVE MATTER Have I missed Sunday Mass without a serious reason? (CCC 2181)
- [ ] Have I neglected the ordinary duties of my state in life: work, family, home?
- [ ] Have I gone a long time without Confession because I could not be bothered?

Spite and malice

- [ ] Have I resented people whose goodness reminds me of what I am avoiding?
- [ ] Have I mocked devout people or the practices of the faith?
- [ ] ◆ GRAVE MATTER Have I come to hate God or the things of God? (CCC 2094)

A wandering mind

- [ ] Do I reach for my phone when I meant to pray or read Scripture?
- [ ] Do I fill silence with noise: news, scrolling, chatter?
- [ ] Am I restless and unstable, starting things and never finishing them?
- [ ] Do I let my mind wander at Mass or in prayer on purpose?

Lukewarmness: the settled form of sloth

- [ ] Do I seek my own comfort first?
- [ ] Have I stopped making an examination of conscience?
- [ ] Have I stopped struggling with my resolutions?
- [ ] Do I rush through my prayers, or skip them when I don't feel like it?
- [ ] Do I put conditions on what I will give God?

What sloth has done

- [ ] Has my neglect left my soul "overgrown with thorns" (Proverbs 24:31)?
- [ ] Has an idle heart filled up with other temptations?

The remedies: have I tried?

- [ ] Do I keep a set time for prayer each day, even when I feel nothing?
- [ ] Do I practice the "heroic minute," getting up on time without negotiating (The Way 251)?
- [ ] Have I done the thing I have been putting off: the Confession, the call, the visit?
- [ ] Do I offer God my dryness itself in prayer ("My soul is thirsting for you," Psalm 63)?
- [ ] Do I use my time well, as a steward (Ephesians 5:16)?

For particular states of life

Married

- [ ] Do I leave the spiritual life of our home to my spouse?
- [ ] Do we pray together?

Single adults

- [ ] Do I drift through evenings and weekends with no plan for God or others?

At work

- [ ] Do I do my work diligently and well, or only the minimum?
- [ ] Have I wasted paid working time?

Parents

- [ ] Do I make the effort to pass on the faith, or leave it to the parish school or religious education?
- [ ] Do I let screens babysit my children?

Young people

- [ ] Do I put off homework, chores and prayer until the last minute or never?
- [ ] Do I spend hours gaming or scrolling?

Beneath the surface

These are not accusations but invitations to let Christ heal what lies underneath.

- [ ] Is my apparent laziness really discouragement: years of trying and falling, or prayers that seemed unanswered?
- [ ] Do I believe the lie that nothing will ever change, so why try?
- [ ] Have I vowed not to get my hopes up again?
- [ ] Can I trust that “hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts” (Romans 5:5)?

Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.

III Meditation: Oil for the Lamp

With the Gospel of the day, Matthew 25:1-13

Find a quiet place, maybe at the end of a long day, and take a slow breath.

The Lord is here with you. Even if you feel nothing at all, He has not gone anywhere.

When you are ready, light a candle if you can, and watch the flame for a moment.

Then picture ten young women waiting for a bridegroom at night, lamps in their hands. He's late. One by one, they get drowsy. All ten fall asleep, the wise ones too. Then at midnight, a cry: "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"

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Five of them have oil. Five don't. "Give us some of your oil." "No, for there may not be enough for us and you." Some things can't be borrowed at the last minute. A friendship with God is built over time, and no one can lend it to you at midnight.

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Now picture a Sunday night in your own house. You meant to pray every day this week. Your Bible is on the nightstand under the phone charger. You pick up the phone instead. Or there's the Confession you've meant to make since Easter. You're not against God. You just feel heavy. Stay with that heaviness for a moment.

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Ask the Lord gently: "Why have I stopped?" Often it isn't that we don't care. It's that we stopped believing it could be different. Years of trying and falling. Prayers that seemed unanswered. A faith that went dry. Tell Him which it is for you.

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Now pray this Sunday's Psalm with your own dryness: "O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water." Say it slowly. Tell Him exactly how dry it is. That prayer counts.

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Hear St. Paul: "Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts." Hope is healed first. Effort follows.

Before you blow out the candle, choose one small thing for this week. Ten minutes of prayer at the same time each day. The Confession you've put off. The phone call you've been avoiding. Say it to Him. Then rest. The Bridegroom is coming, and He wants you there.

How to Use This Guide

The Teaching

Each chapter begins with the outline of that Sunday's homily: the readings, what the sin is, the sins it gives rise to (its "daughters"), what it does to us, and its remedies. Read it slowly. Look up the references that catch your attention.

Examination of Conscience

Use it before Confession, or as a nightly examen. You don't have to answer every question at once; let the Holy Spirit show you what matters. Each examination ends with questions for particular states of life and a few questions about the wounds beneath our sins.

Meditation

A guided prayer with that Sunday's Gospel. Find a quiet place and read it slowly. Where you see a pause, stop and stay with the Lord for a while.

Questions tagged ◆ GRAVE MATTER concern serious matters. For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must all be present together: grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent (Catechism 1857). Fear, habit, ignorance, immaturity and other factors can lessen responsibility (Catechism 1735, 2352). The tag does not mean you have committed a mortal sin. It means the question deserves special care.

Mortal sins should be confessed, in kind and number as best you can recall, before receiving Holy Communion (Catechism 1385, 1456-1457). If you are unsure about anything, bring it to Confession and ask the priest. That is why he is there.

Come to Confession

Saturday	7:30 AM and 3:30 PM
Sunday	7:30 AM, 10:00 AM, 1:00 PM (Spanish) and 5:00 PM
Monday–Friday	5:30 AM and 8:15 AM
Wednesday	also 5:00 PM

Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church
1729 Stop 30 Rd, Hendersonville, TN 37075
(615) 824-3276 · ololcc.org