

It was recently brought to my attention that I had not completed a series on a 1941 speech by Dorothy L. Sayers about the deadly sins, which I began in 2017. I had left out Sloth and Pride. How apropos! I hereby continue the series in reprinting Part VI of Dorothy Sayers' 1941 essay, "The Other Six Deadly Sins". If you would like to read the previous installments, you can find them on the website in our Archived Bulletins from 9/24/17 through 12/10/17.

The Other Six Deadly Sins

by Dorothy L. Sayers

Part VI – *Acedia* or Sloth

The sixth Deadly Sin is named by the Church *Acedia* or Sloth. In the world it calls itself Tolerance; but in hell it is called Despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for. We have known it far too well for many years. The only thing perhaps that we have not known about it is that it is mortal sin.

The war has jerked us pretty sharply into consciousness about this slug-a-bed sin of Sloth, and perhaps we need not say too much about it. But two warnings are rather necessary.

First, it is one of the favourite tricks of this Sin to dissemble itself under cover of a whiffling activity of body. We think that if we are busily rushing about and doing things, we cannot be suffering from Sloth. And besides, violent activity seems to offer an escape from the horrors of Sloth. So the other sins hasten to provide a cloak for Sloth: Gluttony offers a whirl of dancing, dining, sports, and dashing very fast from place to place to gape at beauty-spots; which when we get to them, we defile with vulgarity and waste. Covetousness rakes us out of bed at an early hour, in order that we may put pep and hustle into our business: Envy sets us to gossip and scandal, to writing cantankerous letters to the papers, and to the unearthing of secrets and the scavenging of dustbins; Wrath provides (very ingeniously) the argument that the only fitting activity in a world so full of evildoers and evil demons is to curse loudly and incessantly "Whatever brute and blackguard made the world"; while Lust provides that round of dreary promiscuity that passes for bodily vigour. But these are all disguises for the empty heart and the empty brain and the empty soul of *Acedia*.

Let us take particular notice of the empty brain. Here Sloth is in a conspiracy with Envy to prevent people from thinking. Sloth persuades us that stupidity is not our sin, but our misfortune: while Envy at the same time persuades us that intelligence is despicable—a dusty, highbrow, and commercially useless thing.

And secondly, the War [World War II] has jerked us out of Sloth: but wars, if they go on very long, induce Sloth in the shape of war-weariness and despair of any purpose. We saw its effects in the last peace, when it brought all the sins in its train. There are times when one is tempted to say that the great, sprawling, lethargic sin of Sloth is the oldest and greatest of the sins and the parent of all the rest.

This series will be concluded in next Sunday' Pastor's Notes.

