

HEROIC VIRTUE

Living the Call to Perfection

Ora:

Confronting Yourself

Labora:

Sloth

Q&A:

Small Spaces



Looking
the Beast
in the Eye

Confronting Yourself

We have this nasty habit of blaming the devil for everything. I understand this. Who wants to take responsibility for their own actions? It is better to have a scape goat - "The Devil made me do it!"

The fact is that the devil can not make you do anything. He can only tempt, suggest, encourage, taunt, guide, direct, and other such things. In this sense, he is not the real enemy. The enemy we face is a much more scary thing to face indeed. The BEAST we must truly face, if we are to concur sin is a frightening villain. I shiver to even be writing about it. It is the monster in the closet or under the bed that keeps us awake at night and gives us frightful nightmares. It is the 500 lb. gorilla in the room we dare not mention.

Mention it I shall. We can not fight our foe if we do not know who it is and name it for what it is. So, who is more a threat to my salvation than Satan?

Let us look at it this way. I love pizza. If you put pizza in front of me, I can almost guarantee you that there will be gluttony in my future. On the other hand, I hate all sea food. I just do not like it. And yes, I have tried many kinds, including calamari (regret that one). I have found nothing that lives in the water that delights my palate. If you put fish in front of me and will guarantee you there will be no gluttony on my part.

What is the difference between pizza and fish that with one I will sin and with the other, I will not sin. The answer is not Satan. He can tempt me all he wants to eat too much fish, it will NEVER happen. As it pertains to the pizza, Satan has to do nothing and gluttony will probably still happen. He is not even needed and if he does nothing, how can I blame him? Who am I to blame? What terrible, horrifying demon dared to take me from my resolve to love my Lord more than pizza?

Q&A

HEROIC VIRTUE

Embracing Truth

Q: I like your house idea, but can you explain further why it is important to have a smaller space to be a hermit?

A: What is space? For me, it is something that draws me out of self. In this sense, it is a distraction. If there is space, you want to go there, you want to use it or fill it with something. It is something to look at and think about that is not God. Space, requires attention, attention that is better spent on God.

A small space, closes you in on self and forces you to look into your self, into your heart. A small space restricts your distractions and aids you in being focused on God.

The early Desert Fathers lived in huts or caves. The religious of today live in what is called a cell (a small room). This is no mistake or coincidence. Becoming a religious is about giving up the world and that means giving up space also.

So many today are about building these huge homes with large bedrooms for the children to hide in. For some, the house is not big enough and so they have to rent space to keep all their stuff.

Space is about wanting more of the world, and the more space we have, the more stuff we need and the more stuff we have then more space we need. It becomes a terrible, vicious cycle and one that leads us further and further away from God.

A small space as I envision it here, as I feel called by God to build, is one about a small intimate space that fosters solitude with God and is a form of sacrifice as it calls me to give up the world and to embrace all that is God.

Submit your questions to: fr@getholy.com

Answer - ME - I did it to myself.

You see, I have a disordered passion and desire for pizza. I love the stuff. I love it in a way that I should not. It is a temptation for me as much as alcohol is for the alcoholic.

Satan loves these disordered passions and desires (called concupiscence) that we have. He does not have to do anything and we still stray from God. This concupiscence we have is our personal demon that says "I will not serve" anyone but myself, my own wants and desires, comforts and pleasures.

This demon comes from within, from self and not from Satan or any of his cronies. And so, we have no one to blame but ourself.

Now there are less persuasive concupiscence in us also that we are able to control for the most part. These desires then need the outside force of the world or the devil to get us to sin. We need temptation and opportunities that we would not provide ourselves. When these temptation and opportunities present themselves to us, yes, so often, we sin.

We must then admit to ourselves that if I did not have these desires, then no amount of temptations or opportunities could ever persuade me. If I saw pizza as just another food that is a gift from God as a means for nourishment rather than pleasure, then I would eat it in moderation.

We must admit that it is our desires that get us into trouble. Like I said, if Satan put fish in front of me, I will not sin. Why? I have no desire for it. He might as well be asking me to take an ice pick and stick it in my eye. Not going to happen. Satan knows this. He knows what we desire and what we do not. He does not waste his time tempting us with things that do not tempt us.

This leads us then to our spiritual journey. Our journey, or the process of eliminating these disordered passions and desires (concupiscence)

within us. Notice that I say the disordered passions and desires and not all passions and desires. Passions and desires are natural to us and they, when ordered to God, are good.

Love for pizza is not a sin or temptation. The disordered love for pizza is. It is when I take a good and place attachments to it that are disordered, that take me away from the love of God, that it becomes bad for me.

We note here that love for anything evil is always bad and cannot be made a good no matter what. While I can love pizza in a good way and so desiring it is not a sin, I cannot say the same for murder. To desire murder is just evil and must be completely eliminated. Where my love for pizza is only called to be placed in right order to the mind and will of God for its use in my life as food for nourishment. God in no way asks me to eliminate pizza from my diet so long as I can rightly order it.

If my love for pizza were so bad, that it were indeed like that of an alcoholic that there is no such thing as only one glass or only one slice, then I must in effect, treat it as if it were the same as desiring murder and completely eliminate it from my diet. Not because pizza is bad, but because it is bad for me. Better to go through life with no pizza than to suffer the pains of hell for all eternity. If your eye causes you to sin, then pluck it out. It is better to go to heaven with only one eye than to go to hell with two eyes.

Look deep in your heart and look the beast in the eye. It is not weakness to acknowledge your personal demons, your concupiscence, your disordered passions and desires. It is weakness to not name them, address them, harness them and control them.

Remember, as long as you have them, the devil owns you. My greatest fear is that on my death bed, the devil will put pizza in front of me. Which will I choose? This can only be answered by how I address pizza now.

Sloth

Self motivation is a difficult thing, though there are some who make it look easy. By self motivation I mean that one is able to simply know what needs to be done and does it with out any external or internal incentive for doing it.

Most of us need incentives to become motivated. “Clean your room and I will get you that video game you want.” “Follow the law or go to prison.” “Do not commit evil or go to hell”

Human nature being what it is, incentives are not necessarily a bad thing. They can be good if they inspire people to do good and bad if they inspire people to do evil. This human nature point is important. We have a tendency toward one of the 7 deadly sins called sloth or laziness. People will generally only do what they have to. This is true at work, at home, in our relationships and in our faith. We generally do the minimum.

If you are one who says “not me!,” Think first and ask why you do what you think you are doing that is above and beyond the call? Are you bucking for a promotion? Looking at getting some of those special bonus points from the wife? Looking to impress someone, or need a favor from someone? What are you getting out of it? In all these cases you are doing something motivated by some incentive. That is fine, no shame, no sin, no foul. Like I said, human nature, generally needs an incentive. The question is in trying to achieve your goal, did you do more than you had to? Probably not. That is why we so often fall short of our goals. We put in the minimum only to find out so often that the minimum was not enough.

In the spiritual life, that is a scary proposition, to fall short. Especially if our goal was to get to purgatory. Fall short of that and it is eternal damnation. That is why I always tell people not to shoot for purgatory, but for heaven. Shoot for heaven and fall short, there is a safety net (purgatory). Fall short of that and you miss the net and end up in eternal peril.

Let us bring this back to the realm of labora (work or labor). Work is precisely that, WORK. If it was fun, we would call it fun. It is not fun and so our human nature comes into play, we do the minimum and less if we believe we will not get caught. While doing the minimum is not a sin, doing less is called theft (of a wage for work not rendered). Assuming we do not want to miss the net, I will assume that we do the minimum a lot.

Generosity, by definition is about doing more than the minimum. God calls us to be generous with the gifts He has given to us.

In order to practice generosity with God, we should do so with one another first. Pick up that piece of paper on the floor at work, say a kind word to the spouse and kids, smile and say hello to that stranger, be nice to the clerk that is fumbling and wasting your time, and so many other things that we can do to reach out to touch the lives of others. Remember the words that if you do it for one of these, you do it for me.

I love the words that a good friend of mine taught me, “God will not be outdone in generosity.” Be generous with each other and God will be generous with us. This becomes incentive.

Fun and play? They are fine, but what of work? Work is about generosity with our time. It is about generosity with God as we strive to do our little part to build the Kingdom of God on Earth. We build families. We build relationships. We build our culture and society. We build material things to make life easier. We build futures. We build our Church. We build our Faith...

Our work is more important than we think too often. Let us take it seriously and do more than the minimum, let us be generous with our time and energy. In the end, God will not be out done.

We are still getting started.

Still not finished with the 16 foot extension on the barn. I had planned on putting in the concrete floor but then my pig had babies, so I have her in the barn until the babbies get big enough to join the herd. Maybe in another month we will finish that project.

I say it will finish the project, but in fact it will mean the start of phase 3 of the project. Phase 3 is the building of the stalls for the cows and pigs. At that point the barn should be finished for years to come.

With the barn project well on the way, that leaves the other two major projects necessary for making this an appropriate hermitage that meets the needs of my Rule of Life.

They are the remodeling of the house and the putting in of a garden.

The house project is still on hold until the house sells.

If you know someone who needs a 60'x26' manufactured home with a new kitchen, new siding, new windows and a new roof, please have them contact me. I have put a lot of work and money into it, but no matter what I do, it is just still too big for a hermit to live in. It should make a nice home for someone. Asking price is \$25,000. The sale of the house will provide over 1/3 of the cost of the project.

As to the garden - Saving funds for the house is of higher priority, so the funds to get the rototiller for the tractor are not there. Anyone who has to stick to a budget (which seems to exclude the government) knows that it is a moral matter of good Stewardship with the means God gives you.