

ward off these dreadful states—acedia drives such people to various unnecessary activities and movements, to useless visits, and to everything through which they think they can escape anguish and boredom; it impels them to flee solitude and to compensate for the dissatisfaction they feel. Although they wish and often believe that thus they will be satisfied and come to themselves, in reality, they do nothing but turn away from themselves and their spiritual 'ought' or duty, from their true nature and destiny, and by this from any full and complete satisfaction.

With those who lead an ascetical life, the attacks of this demon—the manifestations of this passion—attain their greatest intensity around noon. St. John Cassian writes:

It particularly troubles [solitaries] at the sixth hour like a malaria which recurs at regular intervals, as the infection brings burning fevers on the suffering soul at predictable set times. Many elders consider this to be the 'noonday devil' which is mentioned in the ninetyeth psalm.

Among those Elders one must cite Evagrius who affirms: "The demon of acedia—also called the noonday demon—. . . presses his attack upon the monk about the fourth hour and besieges the soul until the eighth hour.

What fundamentally distinguishes acedia from sadness is that the former has no precise motivation and that there is 'an unreasonable mental turmoil,' as St. John Cassian says. But having no motivation does not mean that it has no cause. The diabolical etiology is dominant, as the preceding remarks show. However, the passion presupposes favourable soil in order to be able to act. The fact of being attached to pleasure and being in the grip of sadness constitutes one of acedia's forms, the importance of which St. Thalassius underscores. "Acedia is negligence of soul; a negligent soul is one that is sick with the love of pleasure," he notes further. St. Macarius, on his part, blames a lack of faith, while St. Isaac remarks that "acedia comes form the distraction of the intellect" in the spiritual man.

The preceding description of the turmoil characterizing acedia allows us to understand why the Fathers consider it an illness of the soul; its numerous pathological effects only confirm this way of viewing the passion. Standing first among these effects is a generalized darkening of the soul—acedia makes the mind (*nous*) dark, blinding it and covering the entire soul with gloom. As a result, the soul becomes incapable of apprehending essential truths. "For truly the soul sleeps, unaware of any contemplation of virtue or spiritual insight, once it is damaged by the onset of this disease," observes St. John Cassian. The most serious consequence is that through this passion, man is turned away and kept distant from the knowledge of God.

The Fathers not further that acedia—which constitutes a paralysis of soul and carelessness of the mind—engenders an emptiness within the soul, leads

man to a generalized negligence, and makes him cowardly. When united to sadness, it increases it and thus can easily lead to despair. Furthermore, thoughts of blasphemy as well as mad thoughts against the Creator can come forth from acedia; some of its other well-known consequences include the destruction of compunction and the onset of irritability. Additionally, says St. Isaac, "the spirit of distraction comes [from it], which is the source of a thousand temptations.

Contrary to the other main passions, acedia does not give birth to any particular passion on account of its producing almost all of them. "No other demon follows close upon the heels of this one," affirms Evagrius, who explains elsewhere: "The thought of acedia is not followed by any other thought, first because it lingers, and then because it contains within itself almost all thoughts." St. Maximus likewise says that acedia "excites practically all the passions together." In a more general way, St. Barsanuphius teaches that "the spirit of acedia engenders every evil." St. John Climacus consequently notes that "for the monk, despondency is a general death," and St. Symeon the New Theologian as well concludes that it "is the death of the soul and the mind." He adds: "If God were to allow [this demon] to use all his might against us, undoubtedly no ascetics would be saved." In the face of the extent of these effects, the Fathers also affirm that acedia is the most burdensome and most overwhelming of all the passions, "the gravest of the eight principal passions," and that "there is no passion worse than it." St. Isaac says that it "causes [the soul] to taste hell."

The pathology of acedia cannot be considered as constituted by the perverted use of a particular faculty, as is the case in the previously studied passions. St. Maximus observes that this passion entails all of them: "The remaining passions lay hold of either the irascible part of the soul or the desiderative only, or also of the rational. . . But acedia seizes all the powers of the soul." Yet it is not constituted by their contranatural use, since it has no positive foundation in its nature. Evagrius notes that it is in conformity with nature not to have it at all. In a sense, acedia is on the one hand the numbing and deactivation of all the faculties contributing to man's spiritual life, and on the other hand their distraction. St. Thalassius expresses this dual aspect well when he defines this passion as "the negligence of the soul." To a certain degree, one can consider it to be constituted by the absence of spiritual "zeal" given by the Spirit both to the first man as well as to the man renewed in Christ in order to accomplish with fervor their spiritual task. *Jean-Claude Larchet, Therapy of Spioritual Illnesses, vol. 1, pp. 195-201.*

#### Upcoming Events 2014

15 November: Nativity Fast Begins  
5-6 December: All-Night Vigil for St. Nicholas  
31 December: All-Night Vigil for St. Basil/New Year

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!

# The Confessor's Tongue for November 2, A. D. 2014

Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost; Synaxis of the Holy Unmercenary Healers  
In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

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## On The Noonday Demon: Acedia

Acedia (ακηδία) is such a close neighbour of sadness that the ascetical tradition inspired by St. Gregory the Great [of Rome] in the West reunites these two passions into a single one; the Eastern ascetical tradition, however, distinguishes them. The Greek word ακηδία appears in Latin as *acedia*, whence the French and English equivalents (*acédie*, *acedia*). It is difficult to translate this word simultaneously in a simple and all-encompassing manner; the words "sloth" or "boredom," often used to render it, express only a part of the complex reality signified by the term.

Indeed, *acedia* corresponds to a certain state of sloth and boredom, but also of disgust, aversion, lassitude, dejection, discouragement, languor, torpor, nonchalance, drowsiness, somnolence, and sluggishness (of the body as well as the soul). *Acedia* can even drive a man to sleep without his really being tired.

In *acedia*, there is a vague and general dissatisfaction. When he is under the sway of this passion, man no longer desires anything, finding everything bland and insipid and expecting nothing at all.

*Acedia* makes man instable in both soul and body. His faculties become fickle; his mind flits from one object to another, unable to stay focused. Especially when he is alone, he can no longer bear to remain where he is—the passion urges him to leave, to move, to go to one or several other places. Sometimes he begins to wander and roam and generally he seeks contact with others at any price. These contacts are not objectively necessary; but driven by his passion, man feels that he needs them and finds himself 'good' pretexts so as to justify them. He thus establishes and maintains often-futile relationships nourished with idle chatter in which he generally manifest an idle curiosity.

It can happen that *acedia* fills the person subject to it with an intense and permanent aversion for his place of residence, giving him grounds for being dissatisfied with his abode and bringing him to believe that he would be better off elsewhere. This passion "drives him along to desire other sites where he can more easily procure life's necessities." *Acedia* can also bring a man to shun his activities, in particular his work, and makes him dissatisfied with it. The passion leads him then to look for other kinds of work while making him believe that these will be more interesting and will make him happier. . . All states linked to *acedia* are accompanied by worry or anxiety, which in addition to disgust are a fundamental trait of this passion.

The demon of *acedia* especially attacks those who have dedicated themselves to the spiritual life. He seeks to turn them away from the paths of the Spirit, to prevent in manifold ways the activities that such a

life entails, and in particular to harm the regularity and constancy of the ascetical discipline it requires and to break the silence and stillness favouring this life. St. John Climacus thus presents *acedia* as "a paralysis of soul, and enervation of the mind, [and] neglect of asceticism." It renders the spiritual man "desultory and lazy at any task to be done within the walls of his cell. It does not let him sit in his cell and apply himself to his duty of reading." Under this passion's influence, man's mind becomes "idle and empty of any spiritual work"; he becomes indifferent to God's whole work, ceases to desire future goods and even going so far as to belittle spiritual goods. All the Fathers see in *acedia* one of the primary obstacles to prayer. St. John Climacus defines it as "being languid in psalms, weak in prayer." St. Symeon the New Theologian notes: "Above all, the demon of *acedia* usually attacks those who are advanced in prayer or who are assiduous in it." Many remark that it engenders torpor in the soul and body especially at the hour of prayer, urging man to slumber: "When there is not psalmody, the despondency [i.e. *acedia*] does not make its appearance. And as soon as the appointed service is finished, the eyes open," St. John Climacus points out. He notes further: "But [when] the hour of prayer has come, again the body is weighed down. He begins to pray, but he grows sleepy and the psalm verse are snatched from his mouth with untimely yawns."

If it is true that *acedia* most especially affects those who strive to submit themselves to a regular spiritual discipline, reducing for this reason their exterior activities and movements to what is strictly necessary and seeking the greatest silence and solitude; if it is true that the more man orders himself spiritually and isolates himself in order to dedicate himself in silence to the prayer that unites him to God, the more he is attacked by this passion particularly feared by hermits—nonetheless this passion does not leave in peace those living outside any discipline or even any spiritual activity. It challenges them under other guises, as St. Isaac the Syrian comments: to "those who lead their lives in the works of the body," "another *acedia* comes, which is visible in the eyes of all." This *acedia* takes the form of an oft-times vague and muddled feeling of dissatisfaction, disgust, boredom, lassitude—and this vis-à-vis themselves, existence, those around them, the place where they live, their work, or even any activity whatsoever. Such individuals are further affected by groundless restlessness, a generalized anxiety, or a continual or episodic anguish. Generally speaking, they are correlatively seized by a state of torpor, mental and physical numbness, general and constant fatigue experience without any reason and permanent or periodic drowsiness of soul and body. Often at the same time—and in order somehow to