

Thessalonians, as an experienced and skillful doctor; at first he treats his patients' ills with soothing and gentle words. Beginning in charity, he praises them up to a point, until the deadly virus is mollified by such easy remedies, and the swelling of indignation has abated, and they become capable of enduring the more drastic remedy." After stressing the therapeutic approach taken by the Apostle, St. John Cassian then reveals the precepts constituting the proposed remedies: 1) "Aspire to live quietly": that is to say, he comments, "Stay in your cells and [be] not disturbed by various rumors"; 2) "Mind your own affairs"; that is to say, [be] not eager in your curiosity to find out about the doings of the world, and to hear the opinions of many, giving your attention not to your own improvement or the love of virtue, but to running down your brethren"; 3) "Work with your hands, as we charged you." The same Father then recalls and comments on the example that St. Paul gives us of his own behavior in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians: "You yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you . . . With toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you." After citing what follows of this passage, in which St. Paul evokes those who "are living in idleness, mere busy bodies, not doing any work," St. John Cassian observes that the Apostle "is quick to apply the appropriate remedy . . . He resume[s] the compassion of a . . . gentle doctor. He confers to [them] professional advice for healing, saying: 'Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living.' Like a skilled doctor, with a single piece of healthy advice, he treats the cause of so many ulcers which erupt from the infection of idleness. He well knows that the other evil effects which arise from the same disease will be effectively eliminated, once the original infection has been cured." At the same time as he stresses the therapeutic value of St. Paul's counsels with regard to manual labor, St. John Cassian also points out their preventive value: "Consistently acting like a wise and discerning doctor, he not only strives to cure the ills of those who suffer, but also to preserve the well in their good health, and gives them similar useful advice." To close his teaching on this point, St. John Cassian cites the example of Abba Paul, who, although living too far away from any village where he would have been able to sell the fruits of his labor, nonetheless set for himself every day a certain amount of work, and "when his cave was quite blocked up with the products of a whole year's careful work, every year he would put it on fire and burn it"; he concludes: "By doing this he showed that a monk cannot remain happily in one place without manual labor, not even rise to perfect virtue, so that even when the necessities of life do not demand it, he should perform it simply for the purification of his heart, the control of his thoughts, perseverance in the cell, and the defeat and overthrow of acedia itself."

Finally, prayer constitutes the most basic cure of acedia, for man cannot be completely freed from this passion except by the grace of God, which cannot be received except by asking for it through prayer. Without this last remedy, the efficacy of all the others remains incomplete, since they draw all their strength from prayer. For this reason, the fight against the passion, the resistance one offers it, the patience one demonstrates, the hope that one manifests, the mourning and the tears, the remembrance of death, the manual labor—all of these must be accompanied by prayer, which grounds them in God and ensures that these efforts not remain merely human means.

Meanwhile, a difficulty arises from the fact the acedia drives man to abandon prayer and prevents him from having recourse to it. Thus, it is essential that one resist this temptation with all one's might, guarding one's prayer if it has not yet been abandoned, or taking it up again if it has already been lost. The simultaneous practice of prostrations is especially recommended in the case of acedia, as it straightway causes the body (which the passion numbs at the same time as the soul) to take part in the prayer and contributes to drawing both body and soul out of their lethargy. St. Symeon the New Theologian recommends: "Since you know the cause of this state and whence it derives, return with courage to the place where you usually pray; prostrate yourself before the God of mercy; with tears and groaning, asking in your heart's grief to be delivered from this weight of acedia and wicked thoughts; if you strike yourself with force and perseverance, you will obtain in no time your deliverance."

Psalmody appears to be an especially efficacious mode of prayer against acedia, as does the prayer of the heart when practiced with watchfulness and attentiveness, as St. Diadochus of Photice stresses: "To avoid this passion, which dejects and enervates us, we must confine the mind within very narrow limits, devoting ourselves solely to the remembrance of God. Only in this way will the intellect be able to regain its original fervor and escape this senseless dissipation."

The victory over acedia gives man a bit of respite in the spiritual battle. Since, in a certain way, acedia contains within itself all the passions, no passion makes its appearance right away after acedia has been destroyed. "No other demon follows close on the heels of this one . . . but only a state of deep peace . . . arise[s] out of this struggle," notes Evagrius. Beyond this rest, the main effect of achieving victory over this passion is an "inexpressible joy" that fills the soul.

Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet, Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses, volume 3, pp. 73-82

Upcoming Events 2014

5-6 December: All-Night Vigil for St. Nicholas

25 December: Nativity of our Lord in the Flesh

31 December: All-Night Vigil for St. Basil/New Year

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!

Fathers, say, great will be the dwelling place and power to which he shall attain after this.”

Nevertheless, resisting the passion never bears fruit right away. Almost always, the victory over acedia presupposes a long and diligent battle. Also, the course of therapy demands above all that one be patient and persevere; thus, the virtue of patience seems to be one of the main remedies of this passion. Evagrius writes: “Acedia is quelled by patience.” And St. Maximus underscores that this therapy has been given to us by Christ Himself: “Listlessness [i.e. acedia] seizes control of all the soul’s powers and rouses almost all the passions together. That is why this passion is more serious than all the others. Hence our Lord has given us amore excellent remedy against it, saying: “You will gain possession of your souls through your patient endurance.”

Hope appears to be another fundamental remedy, one that most be joined to patience. A man “of good hope is a slayer of despondency; with this sword [of hope] he routs it,” teaches St. John Climacus. And Evagrius counsels: “When we meet with the demon of acedia . . . we are to sow seeds of a firm hope in ourselves while we sing with the holy David: ‘Why are you filled with sadness, my soul? Why are you distraught? Trust in God, for I shall give praise to Him. He it is who saves me, the light of my eyes and my God.’” The hope to be implemented is not only that of being delivered in the long run from this passion and of obtaining rest, but also the hope of receiving future blessings, which—as St. John Climacus notes—constitutes the judgment of this passion and its “utter death.”

A third essential remedy is repentance, mourning, and compunction. If man “remembers his sins, God is his helper in all things and he does not suffer from acedia,” teaches an elder. For his part, St. John Climacus advises: “Let this tyrant be bound by the remembrance of your sins,” and he continues: “He who mourns over himself does not know despondency.” The tears that follow on repentance and spiritual mourning clearly appear to be an even more powerful remedy. Evagrius notes: “Acedia is quelled by tears,” and writes further: “Shedding tears is a great remedy against the nocturnal visions engendered by acedia. The Prophet David applied this remedy wisely to his passions when he said, ‘I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.’”

Another important remedy is the “remembrance of death,” a basic ascetic practice that consists in man constantly remembering that he is mortal and that his death could come about at any moment. Connected to this “remembrance of death” is the advice often formulated by the Fathers of “living each day as if it were the last”—counsel which has in mind not so much man’s preparation to die a good death but to live a good life. In effect, the main function of the “remembrance of death” is to help man not to waste the precious time given for salvation, to “redeem the time” as the Apostle says, and thus to

live each moment with the greatest spiritual intensity: to avoid sin, to practice the divine commandments, and to give oneself over completely to God. The “remembrance of death” is particularly efficacious in the case of acedia insofar as the latter constitutes a state of spiritual nonchalance, lethargy, and sloth; it makes man negligent with regard to his salvation; and drives him to futile activities, movements, and relations—all of which form, from the spiritual point of view, distraction and a loss of time. One of the *apophthegmata* recounts: “Someone asked an elder: ‘Why are you never discouraged?’ And he replied: ‘Because I expect to die every day.’” And St. Anthony the Great teaches: “So as not to be negligent, it is good for us to meditate on this word of the Apostle: ‘I die every day.’ Indeed, if we live as though we were to die every day, we shall never sin. Behold what must be understood by this: every day, when we rise, let us think that we shall not last until the evening; and likewise, when we are about to lie down, let us think that we shall not awake.” In his *Antirrheticos*, Evagrius advises one to counter the thoughts of acedia with these Scriptural verses: “Was for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more”; “Our days on earth are a shadow”; “Are not the days of my life few?” And on this topic, he recalls the teaching of his own spiritual father: “Our holy and most ascetic master stated that the monk should always live as if he were to die on the morrow. . . For, he said, by [this] attitude he will be able to cut off every thought that comes from acedia and thus become more fervent in his monastic practices.” This is justified by the foregoing considerations, but also by the fact that the demon of acedia, as Evagrius notes, “depicts [to man] life stretching out for a long period of time,” thereby seeking to arouse in him laxity and revulsion at the difficulties to come, especially at “the toil of the ascetic struggle.” The fear of God also forms a powerful antidote to this passion: “Nothing is as efficacious,” states St. John Climacus.

Among the remedies prescribed by the Fathers, we must also mention manual labor. Such work can help man avoid boredom, instability, torpor, and sleepiness, which in part make up this passion. Manual labor can contribute to establishing or maintaining the diligence and the continuity of presence, effort, and attention that are presupposed by the spiritual life and that acedia seeks to break. Above all, such work is directly opposed to idleness, one of the main forms that acedia takes, and a source of innumerable ills. Referring to St. Paul’s teaching, St. John Cassian presents at length manual labor as a remedy for acedia, which he essentially envisions in this particular guise. He writes: “The holy Apostle Paul, being a true doctor of the spirit, was instructed by the Holy Spirit to discern the evil which arises from a spirit of acedia, when it first creeps in or when it lies hidden among the monks, and is quick to offer healing remedies in his teaching. Writing to the

Unlike the other passions, however, acedia cannot be healed and replaced by one single virtue that would be specifically opposed to it. St. John Climacus teaches: "Each of the other passions is destroyed by some particular virtue. But despondency . . . is a general death." This characteristic necessitates a multiform therapy, as St. John Cassian stresses: whoever "longs to compete legitimately in the contest for perfection . . . will struggle against this pernicious spirit of acedia on all sides."

The course of therapy presupposes that the illness has been brought to light and diagnosed as such, for this passion is known to lack any motive and thus to be often unconscious or incomprehensible—this is all the more so since one of its main effects is to blind the intellect and to darken the entire soul. For this reason, St. John Cassian writes again that whoever wishes to fight as is fitting must "be swift to purge this disease out of the recesses of his soul." And for his part, Abba Poemen notes: "if man recognizes [this passion] for what it is, he obtains rest."

Since, on the one hand, the passion manifests itself (especially in the case of a hermit) in the need to leave one's cell, to move about, and to come into contact with other people, it is key first of all to recognize that the justifications of this need man makes for himself are nothing but vain pretexts dictated by the passion itself. Knowing this helps so as not to give in to this need. With one accord, the Fathers recommend that when the passion presents itself under this guise, one ought to fight and resist by endeavoring first of all not to leave the place where one finds oneself, no matter the pretext. Evagrius writes, "The time of temptation is no time to leave one's cell, devising plausible pretexts. Rather, stand there firmly and be patient. Bravely take all that the demon brings upon you, but above all, face up to the demon of acedia." He advises further: "When the spirit of acedia rises up against you, do not leave the house and do not shirk the battle." St. John Cassian also notes that man must fight against the spirit of acedia in such a way that he "not quit the monastic enclosure and become a deserter on any speciously pious pretext whatever."

When acedia appears in the form of a tendency towards drowsiness, it is also fitting to resist it by striving not to give in to dozing or sleep. In every case, remarks St. John Cassian, "it has been proved by experience that the attacks of acedia should not be avoided by flight, but resisted and overcome."

Giving in to acedia would be in any case a bad solution, one that would only exacerbate the illness. St. John Cassian notes: "Thus the unhappy soul is vexed and assaulted by these wiles of the enemy . . . until it gives in to sloth, or becomes used to leaving the enclosure of the cell and finding consolation from this burden in visiting other monks. What it uses as an immediate remedy soon becomes a dangerous complaint in itself. For the adversary will assault the victim more often and more severely, once he knows

that he will turn his back if engaged in close conflict, and sees that he puts his hope only in flight, not in victory or resistance." Elsewhere, the same saint says of those attacked by acedia: "If . . . they concede themselves the freedom of going out often, they will bring a worse plague upon themselves by this remedy, as they think it is. It is the same with certain people who believe that they can quell the force of internal fevers with a drink of very cold water, when, in fact, it is clear that this stirs up the fire rather than settling it, since a far graver sickness follows the momentary relief."

Just as the cause of acedia lies not in man's solitary condition, but in his interior, so too is the source of the healing of this illness to be sought in man's relationship with himself and not in his relations with others; in most cases, the impression of being able to receive help from others is a false one. St. Isaac the Syrian writes on this subject: "The health and healing of the man whose soul has become darkened comes to him from *hesychia*. Therein lies his consolation. No one finds the light of consolation in the company of men, nor has anyone been healed by the relations he maintains with them. Acedia leaves him but for a moment, so as to assail him afterwards with greater violence. Blessed is he who endures such temptations by remaining in his cell.

Of course, the Fathers admit that in certain cases, "it is absolutely necessary to meet with an illumined man who has experience of these things in order to receive from him illumination and strength." But this can only be the exception. St. Nil Sorsky likewise advises such meetings only with much reservation: "Sometimes, one has need, as St. Basil the Great said, of entering contact and conversation with an experienced and edifying man, since a visit at a useful time and with a good intention—moderate converse with such a man without pointlessness or idle chatter—is able not only to drive from the soul the acedia hidden within it, but also to procure for the soul some rest and to restore strength and zeal for the combat to come. . . The Father, however, after reflecting on the matter in light of their own experience, says that at the moment of temptation, it is better to remain in one's cell without taking leave of *hesychia*." Through fighting in solitude and resisting the passion, man gains the greatest profit, since his soul is tested and strengthened by this combat. For this reason, Evagrius writes: "When the spirit of acedia rises up against you, do not leave the house and do not shirk the profitable battle at the opportune moment, for your heart will be made radiant, as when one burnishes silver"; and again: "The time of temptations is not the time to leave one's cell . . . rather, bravely take all that the demon brings upon you, but above all face up to the demon of acedia who is the most grievous of all and who on this account will effect the greatest purification of soul." And St. Isaac notes: "Blessed is he who endures such temptations by remaining in his cell. For as the

The Confessor's Tongue for November 23, A. D. 2014

Twenty-Fourth Sunday After Pentecost; Afterfeast of Entrance; St. Aleksandr Nevsky
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.

November 23: St. Aleksandr Nevsky

The son of Prince Iaroslav Vsevolodovich of Vladimir, he was distinguished by reason, courage, power of bodily strength, majestic beauty, love of truth, co-suffering and truly Christian piety. "From his youth he loved Christ and has turned away from worldly sophisms, he was charmed by the voice of the church hymns and his soul thirsted for knowledge of the Holy Fathers. His favorite occupation was the all-night vigil and silent prayer to God". In 1236, St. Alexander was made the Prince of Novgorod.

In 1240, the Swedes attacked his principedom. St. Alexander was not afraid of the enemies and left to fight against them. Not only by the strength of his army, but as much by faith in the help of God, had he with deep feeling of faith spoken before the battle: "God is not on the side of force, but of truth". On the shore of the Neva River the holy prince gained full victory over his enemies for which he received the name "Nevsky". In 1242, he freed the city of Pskov from the Germans. The same year he won a glorious victory over the Lithuanian knights on the ice of Chudskoie (Peipus) Lake (known by the name "Battle on the Ice"). Then in 1242 and 1245, he gained many victories over the Lithuanians.

Having become the grand prince of Vladimir in 1250, St. Alexander did much work at restoring and building up the Russian land, strongly suffering at that time from the violence of the Tartars, and revealed him the firm defender and guardian of Orthodoxy. He repeatedly appeared in the camp of the Tartar khan to petition him on behalf of his oppressed native land, and by this he not only prevented many afflictions, but also was able to ask the khans for many privileges. The first time being among the Tatar Horde, St. Alexander proved not only to be the defender of the advantages of the state, but also the confessor of the Christian faith, ready to suffer for it. As to the requirement of the pagan priests to pass through fire and to worship idols, he bravely answered the Khan Batu: "I shall bow to you, for God granted you a kingdom. I shall not bow to created things (i.e. to idols). I am a Christian and it is not necessary for me to worship created things. I worship God, One in Trinity, who gloriously created heaven and earth. I serve Him and I honor Him". The Khan, respecting the courage and intelligence of St. Alexander, allowed him to forgo the requirement of the (pagan) priests.

Being the zealous advocate of Orthodoxy, St. Alexander rejected the proposition of Pope Innocent IV to accept the Roman Catholic confession, having told the representatives from the Pope with unbreakable resolution: "We know the true history of the faith that contains the teaching given to the

Apostles, and we do not wish to accept your teaching".

The holy prince was the guardian angel of his people, interceding for them before God, to Whom he turned to in difficult times with prayer for help and heavenly protection to Whom he attributed not a few happy events and cases of salvation from various misfortunes. Not one year of the reign of the holy prince, the chroniclers with awesomeness observed: "that this year was a good one for a Christian". "He labored hard for the Russian land, for Novgorod and Pskov, for all the great reigning even giving his life for the Orthodox faith", the holy true believing Prince Alexander was a most remarkable figure of the appanage-veche period of Russian history. For twenty-seven years the holy true believing Prince Alexander reigned, courageously and immutably standing guard over his domestic country and consolidating her security and prosperity.

The Holy Church in its hymns, singing of the valor of St. Alexander, glorifies him as "the authority of pious kings, and the praise of Orthodox princes", "maintainer of warriors, and vanquisher of barbarians", "who is wonderful in wonders, co-habitant with the fleshless ones", "defender of the despairing".

Heavy labor and ascetic effort disturbed the health of the holy prince. Feeling the approach of death and following the inclination of his heart of always rushing to God, he accepted the schema, taking the name Alexis, received the Holy Mysteries, and died on November 14, 1263 and was buried in the Nativity of Christ-Theotokion Monastery in Vladimir (see Vladimir Diocese). According to legend, before the burial of the holy prince a wonder was worked: he himself took in his hand as if alive the prayer of absolution. In 1381 the relics of the holy prince were opened and placed in the cathedral temple of the monastery. During the reign of Tsar Ivan IV the special service for the holy prince was composed and in 1547 it was established to honor his memory on November 23 (the day of his burial). In 1724, by command of Emperor Peter the Great, the relics of the holy prince were transferred to the Alexander Nevsky Laura in St. Petersburg where they now repose.

The Therapy for the Passion of Acedia

Having offered the chapter describing the passion three weeks ago, we now offer the chapter detailing the cure. See Dax today if you would like to order this book at a discount.

In our description of the passion of acedia (despondency), we have seen that one of its distinguishing marks is that it attacks all the soul's faculties and stirs up almost all the passions. Consequently, it signifies the death of all the virtues.