

Introduction

You want to destroy yourself? Cling to your warring emotions; they will devour you. You want to save yourself? Hook those passions onto the infinite purposes of God and you will find yourself elevated, transfigured, enlightened. Pressed in the direction of sanctity, you will save your life.

—Bishop Robert Barron

Through this observation, Bishop Barron shares with us two important truths. First, clinging to sin is as deadly and dangerous to us in this world as it is in the next. It leads us to destruction, not life. Second, sin is connected to things inside us. With great insight, Bishop Barron calls them “warring emotions.” How often do we find ourselves at war with ourselves? We feel unable to keep ourselves from doing things we’d rather not do.

A simple illustration can help explain this predicament. I first heard this analogy from Fr. Mark Toups, and its imagery will give you a reference for the entire book. Imagine that you have an apple tree growing in your yard. Every year, it produces a fresh crop of apples. It doesn't produce cherries or peaches or pears. Why? Because, obviously, it is an apple tree. Now, assume that the apples on that tree are your sins. You pick the apples off the tree through repentance, confession, and effort. You really want different fruit in your life, something other than apples. But frustratingly, you always seem to end up with more apples.

It's easy to see that we keep getting apples because that is what grows on apple trees. If we want peaches, we need a peach tree. If we want cherries, we need a cherry tree. If we want to change the fruit, we need to change the *root*. Applying this analogy to our sin, we can say that sin is a fruit. So if our sin is a fruit, what are the root and tree it grows on? These are the "warring emotions" Bishop Barron refers to. In this book, we'll take a deeper look at the roots of our sin. We will look at how our sin is actually rooted in our thoughts, our beliefs, and our emotions (feelings).

Sin is the fruit of thoughts, beliefs, and emotions (think of these as the trunk of the tree) that are rooted in hurt and pain. As we are bumped and bruised by life, we begin to believe things about ourselves, others, and the world that are not true. Instead of being in harmony with heaven, our “inside life” of thoughts, beliefs, and emotions is in harmony with the world and the enemy.

If you’ve ever experienced despair, fear, shame, powerlessness, or hopelessness, you’ve experienced a reaction to being hurt. Despair might come out as a belief—“It will never get better.” Powerlessness might come out as a thought—“Everybody is taking advantage of me.” These are not God’s truths, but when we accept them as if they are true, we will live according to them. Our own thoughts and beliefs can actually resist God. They hem us in and lead us to behave in ways that are destructive to ourselves, others, and our relationship with God.

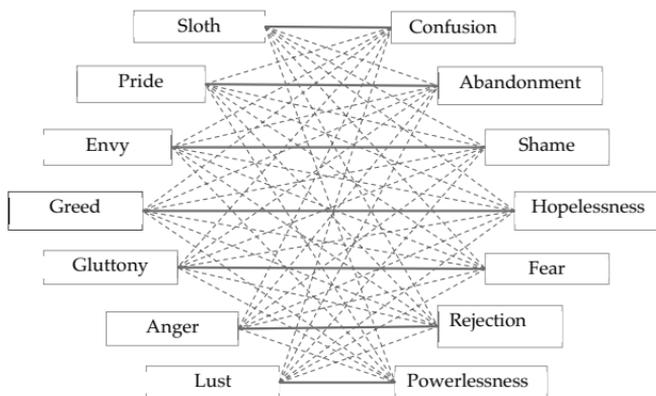
Now let’s turn to the subject of fasting for a moment and how we’re going to approach that practice in this book. As you probably know, fasting is an ancient tradition of the Christian church. We often fast from things we enjoy, things that are pretty benign such as chocolate or other favorite food. It’s much harder to fast from the

things that protect our hurt and that actually shackle us to mediocrity and misery. All of us have these things in our lives. They keep us from experiencing the fullness of God's mercy and purpose for us. In the pages of this book, I'll help you identify some of the shackles in your life as we carefully examine the many different sources and manifestations of sinfulness.

Our fast is organized around four Sevens: the Seven Deadly Sins, Seven Contrary Virtues, Seven Deadly Wounds, and Seven Signs of Healing. Each week, we will contemplate one of the sins and its corresponding virtue, wound, and sign of healing. For example, in the first week we will look at Sloth (sin), Diligence (virtue), Confusion (wound), and Understanding (sign of healing). Each week, the deadly sin or deadly wound will have additional days of reflection. In week one, as we look at the wound of confusion, we will explore some specific aspects of it, like double-mindedness and false-burden bearing.

Don't be constrained by the framework of this reflection. While wounds and sins tend to find natural connections, you may experience them outside this particular framework. For example, you might experience the wound of powerlessness as a root for the sin of anger

instead of lust. Pay attention to your own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. The following graphic illustrates the potential connections between sins and wounds. The solid lines indicate the most common connections, and the framework for this book. The dotted lines represent the possible other connections you might make between sins and wounds.



The Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Contrary Virtues have a deep history within the Church. Much has been written and taught about them, while the Seven Deadly Wounds and the Seven Signs of Healing are drawn primarily from the decades of work done by Bob Schuchts. (You can dig deeply into the topic of

spiritual healing with Bob Schuchts's book *Be Healed: A Guide to Encountering the Powerful Love of Jesus in Your Life.*) As the weekly reflections unfold, you will begin to see the connections between sin, wounds, virtue, and healing—both in reason and within your own interior experience.

As you go through each meditation, pay attention to your thoughts, your feelings, and your beliefs. The enemy will often prompt us in one of these three areas to give us a shove from life to death. He invites us to accept these negative and faulty internal experiences. Don't be surprised if this fast reveals sins and wounds that are new to you. Some of our wounds, and the patterns of thought, belief, and emotion accompanying them, are as old as we are and so deeply ingrained in us that we can hardly see them.

When you reach the Friday reflection, you will find an additional prayer experience. This is a simple prayer based on St. Ignatius's work. It is a manner of praying that allows God to speak to you around the week's topic. This prayer style may be easy for you or quite new and unfamiliar. Even if it seems fruitless at first, I encourage you to keep with it. Trust that God will work through it.

Each Sunday is a *feast* day. It is a celebration, embracing God's grace in the virtue and healing of the week. Living in the reality of God's goodness and healing is important for us. Thanksgiving is one of the most effective ways to embrace this reality.

This fast is for you if you want freedom from the deeper places of your sin, and the hurts and wounds that drive sin. I encourage you to give this fast adequate time in your schedule. Take time to pray, to allow the Holy Spirit and Jesus to speak to your heart. As you read the daily reflection, give it time to penetrate your mind and your heart. Pay attention to words or phrases that excite, agitate, or disturb your emotions. Linger over the scripture passages and quotes from the saints. Give yourself time to answer the reflection questions, and say the closing prayer aloud, slowly, and with emphasis. Allow God to reveal himself to you. Let him show you your sin and hurts. Invite him into your pain. Let him speak to you in it. Wherever you find pain, rest assured that you will also find freedom and mercy nearby in the person of Jesus Christ.

WEEK 1. SLOTH AND CONFUSION

Day 1: Ash Wednesday

Today, I choose to fast from the sin of *sloth*.

There might not be a better place to start a Lenten fast than with the sin of sloth. We often think of sloth as being lazy, but the meaning of this sin is much deeper. St. Thomas Aquinas called sloth a sadness or “sorrow for spiritual good” (*Summa* II:II:35). Sloth is much more about what goes on *inside of us* than about our lack of action. There are two easy measures for this sin in our lives. First: balance. Do you have a good balance between work, family, leisure, and prayer? Too much here and not enough there is an indicator of sloth. Second: effort. If you lack passion or enthusiasm, can’t get started, can’t finish, can’t persevere in hardship, or become distracted or diverted, sloth is a likely culprit. For example, sloth will probably want you to quit this fast at some point. But persevere and make firm your resolve by working slowly through the following meditation.

Pause to hear God speak . . .

“The sluggard buries a hand in the dish, too weary to lift it to the mouth. In their own eyes sluggards are wiser than seven who answer with good judgment.”

—Proverbs 26:15–16

“We earnestly desire each of you to demonstrate the same eagerness for the fulfillment of hope until the end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises.”

—Hebrews 6:11–12

Take time to ask yourself . . .

What is out of balance in my life?

When do I become easily diverted or distracted from things that are important?

Pray slowly . . .

Heavenly Father,

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I renounce sloth and repent all the ways in which I have operated in it. I reject every form of sloth in my life. I ask you, Father, to forgive me, and I forgive myself for my

slothful heart and actions. Holy Spirit, fill me with enthusiasm, passion, and eagerness, and make me aware of any slothful thoughts, feelings, or actions. Amen.

Day 2: Thursday

Today, I choose to fast from the wound of *confusion*.

The story of Adam and Eve gives us the perfect analogy to understand our sin. In Genesis, the fruit that Adam and Eve eat represents sin. If our own sin is fruit, it also grows on a tree, and that tree has roots. Our sin is a reaction to something that happens deeper inside of us—at our roots. These roots are made up of our experiences, emotions, beliefs, and thoughts that are separate from God’s love and care for us. Let’s take a moment to zero in on this idea by looking at the wound of confusion.

Using our tree analogy, we can see that confusion is a primary *root* of the sin of sloth. In other words, sloth is our reaction to being confused. If you’ve ever been sure you should make a right turn while driving, only to find out you really should have turned left, that is confusion. Confusion happens inside us—it is a disorientation of our mind, emotion, or heart. It might feel to you like

a thick fog in your head. It might also feel like a rapid back-and-forth in your thoughts. We just can't figure out the right direction or right thing to do. Confusion will keep us from making a decision, or lead us toward a bad decision. Confusion is at the root, but sloth is the fruit. Working with the reflection below, take a few moments to ponder the presence of confusion in your life.

Pause to hear God speak . . .

“He is not the God of disorder [confusion] but of peace.”

—1 Corinthians 14:33

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and he will be given it.”

—James 1:5

Take time to ask yourself . . .

What type of thoughts and feelings tend to confuse me?

How do I react when I experience confusion?

Pray slowly . . .

Heavenly Father,

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I renounce confusion and repent all the ways in which I have sinned because of it, particularly the ways in which I have rejected your wisdom and peace. I reject every form of confusion in my life. I renounce any lies that I have come to believe, including lies such as “I don’t know what to do,” “I’ll make a mistake,” or “I don’t know where to turn.” Send your Holy Spirit to heal, restore, and transform me. Amen.