

## HOW TO OVERCOME LAZINESS/ SLOTH

Dear friends,

When Fr Paul asked me, on behalf of the Organism, to give a reflection on the theme: how to overcome laziness/ sloth, I immediately thought I was not up to the task that had been entrusted to me. But the next day during Mass the Gospel of Mark 6, 34-44 was read.

At Jesus' question: how many loaves do you have? I immediately thought that the question was addressed to me, and his answer: the little you have is enough, reassured me.

In our lives we seem to have little, but in reality it is enough for me and for others.

Acedia, from the Greek word for "*carelessness*", is the neglect of doing good, the "*annoyance of doing well*", the "*negligence of the things of God and of the soul*".

It is the last of the seven deadly sins.

Acedia is the vice opposite to zeal. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it among the sins against the love of God. It is a temptation not to allow us to do good.

Thinking about this I was then helped by the Pope's Angelus on the first Sunday of Lent where Pope Francis commented on the Gospel of Matthew 4,1-11 where Jesus is tempted by the devil.

Every year, at the beginning of Lent, this Gospel of Jesus' temptations in the desert reminds us that the life of the Christian, in the footsteps of the Lord, is a battle against the Spirit of evil. Jesus reminds us that the devil is allowed to act on us through temptation. We must be aware of the presence of this cunning enemy... and prepare ourselves to defend ourselves against him and to fight him. God's grace assures us victory over the enemy through faith, prayer and penance. When the seducer approaches, he begins to seduce us: "*But think this.... Do that ....*" The temptation is to enter into dialogue with him, as Eve did; and if we enter into dialogue with the devil we will be defeated.

In a homily by Pope Francis at Santa Marta, he described acedia as "*an ugly sin, which paralyzes, which takes away the memory of joy*". In the homily he reflected on the story of the paralytic healed by Jesus. Acedia, therefore, corrodes the psyche and the soul and distances the path to happiness. A vice, for Christians, which also

leads to shrugging one's shoulders and going straight ahead without intervening, bored and melancholic.

In his sermon, the Pope summed up the need to escape acedia as follows. *"Jesus always says to us: Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be happy? Do you want to improve your life? Get up and walk"*. Francis added that the paralytic in the Gospel was sick not so much from paralysis but from acedia, a condition worse than the former because it does not allow the Christian to live his life with enthusiasm and above all with joy. In this regard, listening to the complaints of the paralytic, who had forgotten joy, Jesus first keeps silent without reproaching him and then exhorts him to get up and walk: *"The Lord says to each one of us: 'Get up, take your life as it is, beautiful or ugly as it is, take it and go on. Don't be afraid, go ahead with your stretcher'. But go ahead! With that stretcher, even if it's ugly, but go on! It's your life, it's your joy. Do you want to get well?', the first question the Lord asks us today? 'Yes, Lord' - 'Get up'"*. Like St Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew 2:13 he was called by God to *"get up"* to *"walk"*. *"Get up, take the child and his mother with you and flee to Egypt"*.

Sloth is commonly understood as laziness.

But it must be made clear that it is a particular kind of laziness, the kind one experiences in loving God, in spiritual things.

This clarification is important because there may be people who are very active, but who are affected by acedia, because in the spiritual life they are completely lacking in fervour and commitment.

One way to combat acedia is therefore the courage to go beyond the difficulties. In the Bible an episode has always struck me (Joshua 3:1-17)

Joshua, the successor of Moses, a man full of courage, who for many years had been a good servant of God alongside his predecessor, completes the journey of liberation of the people of Israel.

Now he is faced with the last stage before entering the promised land and, to the many obstacles already overcome in the desert, he now adds the Jordan, which is just at that time in flood.

How to cross the river? The people did not have adequate means, nor were they swimmers, and the task was beyond their capabilities.

The people under the command of Joshua prepare for the crossing of the Jordan in a way that is inconceivable in the eyes of the world. The presence of GOD

risers above them all, and suddenly, in an inexplicable manner, the waters stop and the people go dry, after which the waters resume their course.

So we too, in the difficult moments of our journey, when we find ourselves in front of the Jordan with the waters in flood, we will remember the episode of Joshua and we will be encouraged: the waters will stop and we will pass through the dry. Beware, however: we must take the first step.

Whenever God wants to accomplish something great in us or through us, he shatters our securities and invites us to walk on water. It is his divine wisdom that frees us from our burdens, because he wants us to be light on our way to freedom.

### **A personal testimony:**

When at the beginning of the cell journey I was called to lead a cell as a leader, I won't hide the fact that almost every time before the cell meeting I was seized with a sense of discouragement and tiredness, but as a leader I couldn't back out and asked for the Lord's help. Thanks to this, the cell meeting was full of joy and I felt the action of the Holy Spirit strongly. At the end even though it was already late in the evening, and I usually get up early in the morning, and was very tired, the desire to be with the brothers again was immensely great and the clock and tiredness did not get the better of me.

This made me realise that a very powerful weapon to combat acedia, even if it seems obvious, is prayer to the Holy Spirit to insistently ask for the grace to be able to love and serve Him more and more. The Spirit who prays in us and makes us enter into His Son's heart. This is necessary because this love does not depend exclusively on us because it is of a supernatural order, it is necessary to ask God for it. Perhaps some of you know the beautiful ejaculation, *"You love me, and I love you"*. I learned it many years ago from a saintly priest, Father Valeriano Gaudet, when he used to come to S. Eustorgio to visit Don Pigi, and it was he who suggested to Don Pigi as the path of the cells. I therefore invite you to repeat it frequently every day and, as Father Val taught me, to combine the invocation with our breathing. Breathing in we repeat *"You love me"* so that God's love enters us and breathing out we repeat *"I love you"* to give our love. Try it... . It is a beautiful and effective invocation. Jesus tells us: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* Rest means the strength to do good.

St Thomas said that fidelity to the Lord consists in the ability to do good, even when it costs us and in depriving ourselves of something for His sake. It could be a service done out of love for God to the many brothers and sisters we meet every day.

It would seem that when God sees that we want to love Him with deeds and that we are capable of forgetting ourselves, He immediately ignites in us a stronger love and dedication for Him.

Surely the Holy Spirit will suggest to each of you other ways to fight acedia, but I will limit myself to two: courage and prayer.

Courage, brothers and sisters! *“In the service of the Lord, work not halfheartedly but with conscientiousness and an eager spirit.”* (Romans 12:11). *“Do not be mastered by evil, but master evil with good.”* (Romans 12:21) And let us ask Saint Joseph to intercede for us and to give us the strength to be like him.

I end with the words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, which are very dear to me: *“The fruit of love is service The fruit of service is peace. It does not matter how much you give, but how much love you put into giving.”*