

# The Seven Deadly Sins: #2 –Gluttony©

August 26, 2018

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: Luke 16:19-31

We left last week with the question to ponder: how important is it to deal with the sin that inhabits our lives? Seeing you here today tells me that maybe you think it is indeed worth our time and attention to wrestle with the sin that sneaks into or even we invite into our lives. And we note that though the Deadly Sins were identified by folks in the church around 1,600 years ago, they continue to be alive and well today!

Today we encounter Gluttony. Thomas Aquinas, in the mid 12,00s, defines gluttony as “the inordinate desire for food”. Aquinas said that Gluttony could manifest itself in three ways: as the inability to push back from the table – eating too much; as the desire for only certain kinds or qualities of food – being too picky; or as the use of food from something it was never intended by God to be used for: such as comfort or stress relief rather than nourishment and celebrations of feasting. I struggle with gluttony – have for my whole life. I have an excessive love of food. When I was growing up, food was a reward and a regular part of meaningful celebrations. When the family got together, we ate. Lots. Often. Grandma Blackburn was the best cook EVER. Her baked Alaska, every kind of pie you can imagine (although I would not touch the rhubarb or the mincemeat) were amazing! Everything she cooked was based on real butter and lots of sugar. She was round and plumb and Grandpa Blackburn was thin as a rail. Why? Grandpa worked outside in between meals and Grandma worked in the kitchen most of the day – cooling and tasting, right?

So last week, for the very first time, Garry and I ate a pizza at Danny’s. Been there? I’d heard it was magnificent. It was. The pizza was piping hot and huge and loaded with sausage and pepperoni and cheese. I inhaled the first piece. And since it was pretty large, I thought to myself, that was enough. That was great but that one piece was enough. Have you said that to yourself before too? And the next thing I said to myself was – that was SOOOOOO good I am going to have another piece! Which I did, and the next thing I said to myself was – I wish I had not done that! The second piece just wasn’t as good as the first piece – it had cooled down, for one thing. But once it is on your plate, what’s a person to do? Eat up, right? Later, in the car, I was bemoaning why did I do that??? And Aunt Linda said the same thing! She wished she hadn’t eaten the second piece too!

Now, I wish I could say that this is the first time this has ever happened to me – but it is not. If it were the first time I could claim that now, now I had learned my lesson and next time I would stop with just one piece of pizza...But since this is not the first time – or even the one hundred and first time, I have to admit to being a slave to the sin of gluttony. I can blame my upbringing. Or I can blame our culture. I know that because I did the research! Back in 1985, when the Center for Disease Control first started recording the obesity levels of Adults in the United States, there were no states that registered more than 14 percent of their population as obese. The latest figures I could find, from 2014, showed that no state in the United States reported LESS THAN 20% of their population as obese. And you only have to look around at a pastor’s conference to see that those who lead the church are not immune to the obesity epidemic of our nation. The sad reality is that 70% of the Adults in our country right now are overweight or obese.

Of course, you say, the epidemic of weight gain has to do with the change from occupations that required movement to occupations that are sedentary, with the technology revolution. That accounts for some of the shift. And then there is the belief system that we have latterly swallowed whole in our culture – that MORE IS BETTER! The infamous expression “Super-size me” applies not only to our fast food order, but to everything else in life. From square footage of homes to horse power under the hood, we want more. And if we are led to believe that we can get more and pay less, we are suckers and slaves to the sale. I only need 8 ounces of coffee, but it only costs a little more to get twice as much, so by some wicked reasoning I am better off to spend a little more to get a lot more – ahhhhhhh value!

Caught as we are in the cycle of wanting and then **needing** more, we wrestle with this gluttonous sin of excess. From the rising of the sun to its setting our thoughts are wrapped around that which our hearts long to have more of. We can see or experience virtually nothing else when we are in the clutches of gluttony. That is what happens in Jesus’ parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. There was a rich man, who dressed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day. At his door lay a poor man named Lazarus, but the rich man had no heart for Lazarus, not even offering him the crumbs that fell from his table. The rich man was focused on his on gluttonous feasting, and didn’t much notice Lazarus at all.

Before going further, I want to note that feasting is not a sin. Feasting was something that Jesus loved to do – though the powers that be had trouble with Jesus’ feasting without ritual hand washing or with unapproved persons. NO, feasting is a great gift from God – to have taste buds that enable us to enjoy food and relish the different tastes and textures, as well as be nourished for the journey and find joy in the company of fellow feasters. Feasting is all good...in its rightful place that is. There is just one little phrase that gives us insight into the problem with the feasting of the rich man. It has to do with timing. You see, Jesus said that the rich man feasted EVERY DAY – and I suspect Jesus meant that he feasted ALL DAY as well.

On Sabbatical, as I was driving to and from my Spanish immersion week up in Bemidji Minnesota, I listened to a book entitled, “The Obesity Code” which made a great deal of sense to me – explaining that as a culture we have moved away from the cycle that our bodies were designed for – a cycle of feasting and FASTING – and all we do is FEAST! Did you mother tell you what mine did? Breakfast is the most important meal of the day? So you make sure to hop up and being a process that goes right up until bedtime, or at least pretty close, of making sure that you experience satiation the very moment something resembling a hunger pang should occur? IF in fact it ever has the chance to actually be felt between the three square meals and the 6 round snacks???

When Fred Buechner defines gluttony he claims that it is: “Raiding the refrigerator as a cure for spiritual malnutrition.” Today, as we talk about gluttony and the hunger we are trying to satiate in our lives through eating too much or buying too much or just period craving too much, I place this BIG GULP cup on the throne. Gluttony in Latin, Glutio, means “to Gulp”. The 7 Eleven Gulp comes in 4 sizes – 20, 30, 40 and 50 ounces! Gulp, Big Gulp, Double Gup and Super Gulp. Gulping is ingesting without tasting – much less savoring the gift of nourishment or sustenance we are taking into ourselves. Each of the deadly sins are deadly because they lead to us placing something besides loving God and neighbor on the throne of our lives. *It is functional idolatry to crave more food than we need.* Whether we have gotten sucked into a cultural belief that more is better, or whether we grew up believing that our worth could be measure by the size of the slice of cake we got to ingest, when we seek to fill the hole in our soul with something finite we will still be hungry.

To counter the sin of gluttony the ancient practice of fasting is called upon. To go without. To push back from the table hungry. To choose not to indulge. Maybe completely – or possibly just fasting from something you really enjoy in order to acknowledge your love for God and to spend time in prayer. Fasting helps us keep food in its proper place, ensuring that we can control our appetites rather than be controlled by them. Fasting can also connect us more closely to those for whom hunger is a regular companion – it is hard to feel empathy for the hungry person when you never experience an unmet hunger pang! One of the ways to raise our consciousness about those who hunger is to include in our prayers of gratitude for our feasting a petition for those who have no food for which to give thanks – becoming a reminder to eat in moderation and to give to those who hunger. Fasting proclaims that our deepest needs are not met by food or anything else that we can consume, but by good.

Soon we participate in a feast. It is not a feast of quantity – it is a simple feast and sign of the heavenly food that God provides – the bread of life that satisfies the deepest longings of our soul. Come. Taste and see. Be filled. Be whole. Amen.

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