Sunday of 5th Week of Lent

SLOTH

"We are certainly in a common class with the beasts; every action of animal life is concerned with seeking bodily pleasure and avoiding pain" – St. Augustine

ST IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

St. Ignatius of Loyola struggled with sloth, not in the sense of being lazy but in avoiding what God was calling him to do. He became a soldier out of a desire to bring glory in battle and killed non-Christians for denying the Divinity of Christ. He desired to serve God but avoided serving God in ministry since he wanted to serve on the battlefield. In 1521, while defending the town of Pamplona against French attack, Ignatius was struck by a cannonball in the legs. One leg was merely broken, but the other was badly mangled. To save his life and possibly his legs, doctors performed several surgeries. As he lay bedridden, Ignatius developed a desire to become a working servant of Christ and began to accept a call to ministry rather than avoid it. Among his profound realizations, was that imagination brought him happiness and fantasy sorrow. He began to recognize the connection of fantasy to avoidance of reality and that it was connected to Evil. When he used his imagination in prayer to confront the reality of his situation then he was led to God. This led to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.

Ignatius taught that the tepidity or dullness our hearts experience when we feel separated from God are contrary to the dynamism we experience when we praise, revere, and serve God. Tepid or slothful hearts lose their desire for communion with God and give in to spiritual sloth. In his Rules for Discernment, found at the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius reminds us that when our hearts are tepid and inclined to low and base things, we ought to increase our prayer, penitence and self-examination. These practices re-energize our lethargic and drowsy hearts and rekindle the fire to go out to all peoples to proclaim the wonders God has worked in our lives.

The deadly sin of sloth has a false God of comfort where we seek to do what is comfortable rather than what God is calling us to do. Sloth has two forms. One form is when someone wants to avoid doing what is hard and just do what is easy. The other form is working but making the excuse that because they are busy they are doing God's will. We avoid praying by saying we are too busy to pray. This is slothful since we are engaging in avoidance rather than doing what God is inviting us to do. How have you fallen into sloth and sought to avoid something rather than confronting it with God's help?

For your prayer

St. Ignatius would have prayed with John 11:1-45. Use your imagination as you slowly read John 11:1-45. Please reflect on how Jesus was not engaging in sloth by waiting to go to Lazarus but doing the Father's will. Reflect on how you have fallen into sloth by avoiding what God was inviting you to do and doing your will instead.