

A NOT SO RARE ADDICTION

My nature is to be active. I usually wake up early in the morning charged and ready to go. I remain busy during the day often well into the late hours of the night, sometimes into the wee hours of the morning. There was a time when I worked through the night once a week without any negative side effects the next day. You see I suffer from a common American addiction. It doesn't yet have a proper medical name. Perhaps it should be called *opus excessius* – “excessive work” for those not adept in pig Latin.

This particular addiction has many manifestations. The *Herculean Syndrome* is characteristic of those who attempt to carry the weight of the world on their shoulders. Their forward bent as they struggle under the weight of world's problems gives them away. The *Up-Tight Syndrome* is common with those heroic persons who believe that today's problems are an inadequate challenge, so they pile on tomorrow's difficulties also. Their worried countenances give them away. The *Busy-Busy-Busy Syndrome*, an American favorite, is common among those who neglect God and their family because they are so absorbed in accomplishments. They can be identified by their darting eyes looking for something to do while talking with them. Finally there is the *Religious Activist Syndrome*. This peculiar addiction is absorbed in the externals of religion without embracing the self-sacrificing love that makes Christianity come alive and authentic. They can be recognized either by their self-satisfied expressions or observed on the pedestals they climb so they can hurl thunderbolts of self-righteous indignation at the peasants below.

The one characteristic that is common to all of our *opus excessius* addictions is that they lead us to become under prayed because they are so over worked. On the list of daily priorities prayer seems almost always to be at the bottom, if it is on the list at all. As someone who is a recovering addict, I speak from personal experience. I am now at an age when I am closer to the end of my life than I am to the beginning, so I think about these things. I can't imagine that I would dare to drag before God's judgment a list of my accomplishments. I'll rely on his mercy, but that's a story for another time. The issue here is prayer. So why is it a big deal?

The New Testament has a lot to say about prayer. I'm struck by all the times Jesus prayed, even whole nights. In comparison my one-hour of adoration from 10 to 11 PM on Saturday night seems insignificant. If the perfect Son of the Father prayed fervently and frequently how much should I be praying? It is said that W. C. Fields was observed reading the Bible on his deathbed. He claimed he was looking for loopholes! That's the problem with the Bible; it doesn't have any loopholes.

Jesus was never one to sugar coat the truth. “But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man” (Lk 21:34-36). St. Paul admonished the Romans to “be constant in prayer” (Rom 12:12), a command he

also gave the Thessalonians when he wrote: “pray constantly” (1 Thess 5:17). St. James admonishes us to “pray for one another.” Then he adds: “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” (Jas 5:16). To the Colossians he wrote “continue steadfastly in prayer” (Col 4:2). You see what I mean? There is no wiggle room.

My favorite part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the last part on *Christian Prayer*. Keeping this Newsletter to manageable proportions does not permit citing many passages, so I will only highlight a few.

2612 “The disciples’ prayer is a battle; only by keeping watch in prayer can one avoid falling into temptation.” Subsequently, in paragraph **2725** this motif is expanded. “The ‘spiritual battle’ of the Christian’s new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer.” Whenever I read these statements, they penetrate my heart. I think we all know that prayer was a battle, but something more is being taught here. The Church is teaching that the battle of prayer and the battle we face in our spiritual life is the same battle. Thus, paragraph **2725** concluded: “The ‘spiritual battle’ of the Christian’s new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer.” As a result we can view our prayer life as an accurate gauge of our progress in the spiritual life. To that reality we must give an honest assessment. The words that seem to fit me are “miserable,” “inadequate,” “tepid,” and “pathetic”. How about you?