

The Disharmony Within

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"I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom 8:19).

This is an interesting quote from St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans*. The context is St. Paul's description of a war within himself, a war between the law of God and the law of sin. While St. Paul delights in his discovery of this law of God, he still finds himself wrestling internally with his old habits of sin.

Can we not all relate to St. Paul's struggles? We seek to live upright lives and to follow the commandments, especially love of God and love of neighbor. But we struggle! Like St. Paul, we don't do the good that we seek, but we do the very evil we are trying to avoid. Why is this?!

The ancient Greek philosophers also noticed this difficulty. Some like Plato divided the human psyche into different levels with rationality and intellect at the top and our passions and emotions at the bottom. For Plato, the human being who was living his/her best life was the one who put the passions and the emotions under the control of the intellect. In other words, the mind was in charge of the person, not their emotions, urges, and desires.

The early Christians took up the philosophers' theory and merged it with what we know from God's revelation. What they came up with is an insightful view of humanity that both explains how we are supposed to be and why we struggle to live up to that ideal.

The early Christians claimed that God created us to be in harmony with Him, with each other, and even within ourselves. In this perfect plan our passions, emotions, urges, and desires would be in service to our good. For example, our hunger and cravings for food would be perfectly ordered to our health. Our anger would have been ordered to correcting a wrong and giving us the energy to take correct action. Our sexual desires would have been ordered to love of spouse and the creation of children. All this was lived in the Garden of Eden with the sinless Adam and Eve who were naked without shame.

But then it all went wrong! Reading the book of Genesis we see how quickly things changed after the Original Sin of Adam and Eve. There was an immediate disharmony between our first parents and God (they hid from Him), between each other (they began to blame each other), and even within themselves (they had to cloth/protect themselves from the other's disorder desires).

This effect of interior disharmony has been passed down through the ages. All those things that were supposed to lead us to health, happiness, and goodness now mislead us. We can no longer trust our hunger, anger, sexual desires, emotions, stress reactions, anxieties, or any other urges of our mind and body to lead us to doing what is good.

How are we supposed to live in such a state of disharmony?! "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 8:24-25). This is St. Paul's response. He knows his struggles, and in those struggles he

turns to God and to the Grace given by Jesus. God is the one who initially designed us, and He designed us to be good. He is the one who can restore what sin has destroyed.

Examine your own life. Pick one of your passions and pay attention to where it leads you. Note how your desires which were supposed to lead you to correct choices often lead you astray. How your hunger for food doesn't lead to eating the right foods in the right proportions but to eating the wrong foods in excess. How your anger doesn't stop at correcting a wrong, but leads to bitterness, vengeance, and hatred. How your sexual desires lead your eyes or your mind to people or images that distract from the love of your spouse or future spouse.

After you have noticed your own disharmony, bring it to God in prayer. Invite Him. "God, please enter this area of my life. With your Grace, help me to bring harmony to my life. Help me not to let my passions, urges, and desires control what I do, but to subject them to what is good and right."

It may seem like sin has stacked the cards against us. But like St. Paul, we know that we have a God who is willing to help us. A God about whom the Angel Gabriel said, "With God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1:37). So, let us strive, with the help of God's Grace, to restore the harmony within ourselves, that we may do the good that we want and avoid the evil we do not want.