

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
May 7, 2017
Spiritual Ponderings
15th Diseases of Leadership

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi* he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist,* others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood* has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Messiah. From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he* must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." (Mathew 16:13:23)

The above passage from the Gospel of Mathew demonstrates that from the very beginning that leaders in our Church have a need to constantly examine their leadership decisions to make sure that they are in keeping with God's will. A couple of years ago, Pope Francis came out with a list of what he called "diseases of leadership." I would to reflect with you this month on these diseases so that we may all become better Christian leaders. The diseases will be in bold and my reflections will be in regular font.

1. THE DISEASE OF THINKING WE ARE IMMORTAL, IMMUNE, OR DOWNRIGHT INDISPENSABLE, [and therefore] neglecting the need for regular check-ups. A leadership team which is not self-critical, which does not keep up with things, which does not seek to be more fit, is a sick body. A simple visit to the cemetery might help us see the names of many people who thought they were immortal, immune, and indispensable! It is the disease of those who turn into lords and masters, who think of themselves as above others and not at their service. It is the pathology of power and comes from a superiority complex, from a narcissism which passionately gazes at its own image and does not see the face of others, especially the weakest and those most in need. The antidote to this plague is humility; to say heartily, "I am merely a servant. I have only done what was my duty."

As I reflected upon this disease of leadership, I remembered this quote from Abraham Lincoln: "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right." It is important to remember that ultimately, we are not the ones in charge and we must make a report to God not only for our sins but also for how we used our gifts and talents.

2. ANOTHER DISEASE IS EXCESSIVE BUSYNESS. It is found in those who immerse themselves in work and inevitably neglect to "rest a while." Neglecting needed rest leads to stress and agitation. A time of rest, for those who have completed their work, is necessary, obligatory and should be taken seriously: by spending time with one's family and respecting holidays as moments for recharging.

This disease of leadership made me think about the following quote from Mother Teresa: "At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by 'I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in.'"

The idea that relationships are more important than being busy also separates us from Communism. Cardinal Van Thuan who suffered greatly under Communism in Vietnam pointed out in his writings how Communists concern themselves only with the body of a person and took no time to help or care for the soul of a person.

3. THEN THERE IS THE DISEASE OF MENTAL AND [EMOTIONAL] “PETRIFICATION.” It is found in leaders who have a heart of stone, the “stiff-necked;” in those who in the course of time lose their interior serenity, alertness and daring, and hide under a pile of papers, turning into paper pushers and not men and women of compassion. It is dangerous to lose the human sensitivity that enables us to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice! Because as time goes on, our hearts grow hard and become incapable of loving all those around us. Being a humane leader means having the sentiments of humility and unselfishness, of detachment and generosity.

Catholics are always called to see positions of leaderships as opportunities to serve others and to make the world a better place. We must also realize that no one should be treated as a cog in a machine or as an economic agent for good or for bad. We should treat each person as we would Christ.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
May 14, 2017
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Let us continue our look at Pope Francis’s “15 Diseases of Leadership”. Pope Francis’s diseases are in bold and my commentary in normal font.

4. THE DISEASE OF EXCESSIVE PLANNING AND OF FUNCTIONALISM. When a leader plans everything down to the last detail and believes that with perfect planning things will fall into place, he or she becomes an accountant or an office manager. Things need to be prepared well, but without ever falling into the temptation of trying to eliminate spontaneity and serendipity, which is always more flexible than any human planning. We contract this disease because it is easy and comfortable to settle in our own sedentary and unchanging ways.

The virtue is always in the middle of two vices. When we lead, we need to make sure that we plan enough that the event can take place but not too much that we get angry when something that we were not expecting happens. I can plan my day so that I can efficiently be a good steward of my time and at the same time I need to be open to people stopping by the rectory and wanting to stop or receiving a call asking me to come to the hospital. If I get mad when my plans must change then I know that I am suffering from this disease and I need to pray more.

5. THE DISEASE OF POOR COORDINATION. Once leaders lose a sense of community among themselves, the body loses its harmonious functioning and its equilibrium; it then becomes an orchestra that produces noise: its members do not work together and lose the spirit of camaraderie and teamwork. When the foot says to the arm: ‘I don’t need you,’ or the hand says to the head, ‘I’m in charge,’ they create discomfort and parochialism.

It is important that we do our best to cooperate with those that God wants us to work with as co-leaders. We know that this is not easy because we know that the Apostles argued many times over who was greatest. Remembering that you are all on the same team and want the same thing, can be the start of overcoming this disease. This disease can be identified in us when we feel that we have a NEED to have things done our way all the time.

6. THERE IS ALSO A SORT OF “LEADERSHIP ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE.” It consists in losing the memory of those who nurtured, mentored and supported us in our own journeys. We see this in those who have lost the memory of their encounters with the great leaders who inspired them; in those who are completely caught up in the present moment, in their passions, whims and obsessions; in those who build walls and routines around themselves, and thus become more and more the slaves of idols carved by their own hands.

“This is the way that we have always done things,” I have discovered in my opinion is the second worse reason to do something with the first reason being simply changing for the sake of change. We should always realize that change is hard but is also necessary. We also should realize that we are dealing with people who have attached positive and negative values to the ways of the past. It is important for people to talk about the past so that we can move forward bring the most number of people.

7. THE DISEASE OF RIVALRY AND VAINGLORY. When appearances, our perks, and our titles become the primary object in life, we forget our fundamental duty as leaders—to “do nothing from selfishness or conceit but in humility count others better than ourselves.” [As leaders, we must] look not only to [our] own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Fr. Henri Nouwen in his book *Reaching Out: Three Movements in the Spiritual Life*: “It really does not have to be so dramatic. Fear and hostility are not limited to our encounters with burglars, drug addicts or strangely behaving types. In a world so pervaded with competition, even those who are very close to each other, such as classmates, teammates, co-actors in a play, colleagues in work, can be infected by fear and hostility when they experience each other as a threat to their intellectual or professional safety. Many places that are created to bring people closer together and help them form a peaceful community have degenerated into mental battlefields.”

Fr. Nouwen and Pope Francis both warn us against turning everything into a competition and to avoid the sin of envy.

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May 21, 2017
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Let us continue our look at Pope Francis’s “15 Diseases of Leadership”. Pope Francis’s diseases are in bold and my commentary in normal font.

8. THE DISEASE OF EXISTENTIAL SCHIZOPHRENIA. This is the disease of those who live a double life, the fruit of that hypocrisy typical of the mediocre and of a progressive emotional emptiness which no [accomplishment or] title can fill. It is a disease which often strikes those who are no longer directly in touch with customers and ordinary employees, and restrict themselves to bureaucratic matters, thus losing contact with reality, with concrete people.

Church leaders must be careful not to develop a “cult of personality” around them. People who are more interested in being their friend than in getting to know Jesus. This can happen if we are not living what we preach. If we are not living a life of constant conversion we can lead people astray because of our love of their praise and attention.

9. THE DISEASE OF GOSSIPING, GRUMBLING, AND BACK-BITING. This is a grave illness which begins simply, perhaps even in small talk, and takes over a person, making him become a “sower of weeds” and in many cases, a cold-blooded killer of the good name of colleagues. It is the disease of cowardly persons who lack the courage to speak out directly, but instead speak behind other people’s backs. Let us be on our guard against the terrorism of gossip!

The best way to deal with this is first refuse to participate in gossiping, grumbling, and back-biting. The second thing we can do is practice what psychologists call Positive Sentiment Override. This simply means we intentionally think more positive thought about someone than negative ones. When I was newly ordained I was assigned to a parish where there was a staff person who I did not get along with. We often spent a lot of time talking bad about each other and thus not getting anything accomplished. I decided therefore to say a quick prayer of thanksgiving for the person before we would meet naming three of her positive qualities and sure enough over time I began to treat her better and eventually she began to treat me better and we began to accomplish things. Negativity can also slow things down and so getting rid of it makes us more efficient.

10. THE DISEASE OF IDOLIZING SUPERIORS. This is the disease of those who court their superiors in the hope of gaining their favor. They are victims of careerism and opportunism; they honor persons [rather than the larger mission of the organization]. They think only of what they can get and not of what they should give; small-minded persons, unhappy and inspired only by their own lethal selfishness. Superiors themselves can be affected by this

disease, when they try to obtain the submission, loyalty and psychological dependency of their subordinates, but the end result is unhealthy complicity.

We should remember that our Church is a “hospital for sinners and not a hotel for saints.” (I think St. Augustine said this). This means that individuals in our Church can make mistakes while the Church as a whole cannot error because of the Holy Spirit. I know that I have been wounded by the Church’s leadership but this does not shake my faith because I don’t give them that much power.

11. THE DISEASE OF INDIFFERENCE TO OTHERS. This is where each leader thinks only of himself or herself, and loses the sincerity and warmth of [genuine] human relationships. This can happen in many ways: When the most knowledgeable person does not put that knowledge at the service of less knowledgeable colleagues, when you learn something and then keep it to yourself rather than sharing it in a helpful way with others; when out of jealousy or deceit you take joy in seeing others fall instead of helping them up and encouraging them.

We have to realize that the person we proclaim to be the best leader is Jesus Christ and not Caesar Augustus (or other worldly leader). Jesus was concern with others while Caesar Augustus was concern only with his own advancements, fame, needs, and wants.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
May 28, 2017
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Let us continue our look at Pope Francis’s “15 Diseases of Leadership”. Pope Francis’s diseases are in bold and my commentary in normal font.

12. THE DISEASE OF A DOWNCAST FACE. You see this disease in those glum and dour persons who think that to be serious you have to put on a face of melancholy and severity, and treat others—especially those we consider our inferiors—with rigor, brusqueness and arrogance. In fact, a show of severity and sterile pessimism are frequently symptoms of fear and insecurity. A leader must make an effort to be courteous, serene, enthusiastic and joyful, a person who transmits joy everywhere he goes. A happy heart radiates an infectious joy: it is immediately evident! So a leader should never lose that joyful, humorous and even self-deprecating spirit which makes people amiable even in difficult situations. How beneficial is a good dose of humor! ...

I am more likely to jump out of an airplane after meeting a paratrooper who says “I get to jump out of airplanes” than if I had met a paratrooper who says “I have to jump out of airplanes.” When people see us lead, do they get to see us lead in such a way that we say “I get to be a Christian” or does it appear that we are saying “I have to be a Christian.” If we are not excited how can we expect others.

13. THE DISEASE OF HOARDING. This occurs when a leader tries to fill an existential void in his or her heart by accumulating material goods, not out of need but only in order to feel secure. The fact is that we are not able to bring material goods with us when we leave this life, since “the winding sheet does not have pockets” and all our treasures will never be able to fill that void; instead, they will only make it deeper and more demanding. Accumulating goods only burdens and inexorably slows down the journey!

I use to think of the sin of gluttony as only as wanting more for the sake of wanting more. Now I believe gluttony has more to deal with wanting more in order to cover up some emotional problem or fear. I can become gluttonous when I don’t want address my fear of loneliness in the right way. Hoarding is a sign that there is something emotionally wrong with us and we should get help in addressing that issue so we can live healthy lives.

14. THE DISEASE OF CLOSED CIRCLES, where belonging to a clique becomes more powerful than our shared identity. This disease too always begins with good intentions, but with the passing of time it enslaves its members

and becomes a cancer which threatens the harmony of the organization and causes immense evil, especially to those we treat as outsiders. "Friendly fire" from our fellow soldiers, is the most insidious danger. It is the evil which strikes from within. As it says in the bible, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste."

Michael Bay, the director of the Transformer movies, said that in the first movie he purposely limited the dialogue of the evil robots in order to make them as scary as possible. The more people talk with those that they consider scary the less scary they become. Being a new person entering a large group can be scary and being a large group accepting a new person can also be scary for the group. It is therefore important to give each other time to talk and trust each other.

15. LASTLY: THE DISEASE OF EXTRAVAGANCE AND SELF-EXHIBITION. This happens when a leader turns his or her service into power, and uses that power for material gain, or to acquire even greater power. This is the disease of persons who insatiably try to accumulate power and to this end are ready to slander, defame and discredit others; who put themselves on display to show that they are more capable than others. This disease does great harm because it leads people to justify the use of any means whatsoever to attain their goal, often in the name of justice and transparency! Here I remember a leader who used to call journalists to tell and invent private and confidential matters involving his colleagues. The only thing he was concerned about was being able to see himself on the front page, since this made him feel powerful and glamorous, while causing great harm to others and to the organization.

Being wealthy or famous does not allow us to live by a different moral code. As Catholics were all bound by the Universal Call to Holiness, the Law of Love, 10 Commandments, and 8 Beatitudes.