

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

August 6, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Toxic Behaviors

Most people that know me or who have heard me speak, know that throughout my life I have struggled with depression. It is a part of my life that, thanks to some great counselors, I have learned to manage and control. In many ways, I look back upon my battle with depression and time in counseling as a gift because the experiences have given me a greater self-awareness and this has allowed me to help others when they come to me with a variety of different issues that are bothering them.

The other day, I was going through my stuff in an effort to simplify my life and I came across a box of papers that I had saved for future use but had since forgotten about. As I went through this box of papers, I came across a paper that was titled "Seven Toxic Behaviors that Push People Away." Sadly, I do not remember which counselor who has gave it to me. Upon finding it, I immediately thought that this would be a great topic for my Spiritual Pondering reflections. So, over the next month, I would like to share with you my reflections on these seven toxic behaviors that people may do (knowingly or unknowingly) that ultimately end up poisoning and ruining relationships.

Before, I dive into the seven toxic behaviors, I want to say a word about feelings, emotions, and temptations. I think it is important to realize that feelings, emotions, and temptations are all neutral. They are neither morally good or evil. Remember that Jesus was tempted in the desert by the devil and He experienced a wide variety of emotions but never sinned. When we feel an emotion like anger we should not beat ourselves up for feeling angry but instead we should explore why it is that we feel angry. Often this will help us use our anger in a morally good way instead of allowing the feeling of anger to lead us to sin. A person might be tempted to look at something inappropriate on the internet. If he or she gives into the temptation and look at something inappropriate, then he or she has sinned. However, if a person being tempted chooses to get up away from the computer and pray.

I am all for turning a weakness into a strength but that does not happen simply by ignoring our weaknesses. The first step in becoming a better person is to admit that we need to improve. The second step is to admit that is alright to be a person who needs to improve because everyone needs to improve. The third step is to figure out what it is that we need to improve and to begin improving. All of this presupposes that we have asked God for grace and strength. Upon finding it, I immediately thought that this would be a great topic to tackle in my Spiritual Ponderings. So, over the next month, I would like to focus on these 7 toxic behaviors. Quotes from the paper will be in bold and my commentary will be in regular font.

First Toxic Behavior is Envy

Do not measure your life and success in comparison of someone else. Be your own person and live your life to your means. Constant envy and jealousy will only push people away because they will not want to be part of your consistent competition.

Someone wants told me that the reason why the seven deadly sins are so deadly is because they distort our reality. For example, giving into pride distorts our reality by making us think that we are the center, purpose, or end of the universe instead of God. Envy is the second of the seven deadly sins because it causes a distorted view of others. Instead of seeing others as brothers and sisters in Christ, we see them as competition either for God's love or happiness. The truth of the matter is that there is no competition for God's love because God's love is infinite. He loves all of us equally.

Each of us has grown up in a world though built on competition which breeds envy. When we are young we are told that we must be the smartest, most beautiful, the most talented, etc. When this happens, it is hard not to see everything as competition. If, we keep looking for honor/fame, pleasure, power, or wealth to make you happy then others will be competition for you. Getting over envy is all about focusing on the Father's love for us. The more we realize that God loves us all and that we are all different, it is easier to move away from envy and the desire/need to tear others down.

In my own life, I used to desire to be an extravert because it seemed like priests who were extraverts had the ability to make their parish love them. I realize that I can make a parish love me but it takes a little longer because as an introvert, I need more one-on-one time. If I try to be the extravert that I am not, I will fail. If I spend time getting mad that God made other people extraverts and not me, I will fail. If I can compensate for not being an extravert by seizing opportunities like one-on-one meetings and small group meetings, I will succeed with God's grace.

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August 13, 2017

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Growing up, I was often bullied by others. No one should ever be bullied, I look back upon that time and see that I often did not help the situation by the ways I acted either. Sometimes, I made myself a target. For example there was a period in my life in which I tried to get others to like me by exaggerating my accomplishments. Sadly my efforts to impress my peers made me more of a target. When I finally stopped this behavior of telling tall tales in order to impress people; I found that fewer people would pick on me and I was actually beginning to make more friends. As we continue to explore the idea of toxic behaviors I remind you that quotes from the handout will be in bold and my commentary is in plain text.

Overly Sensitive

Try to remember that it's not always about you. People that over analyze everything and view things as a direct assault are destined to be lonely. No one wants to deal with the dramatics. If you're an overly sensitive person, do not take everything personally.

I have become a firm believer that most problems in a relationship happen out of neglect and not out of malice. This fast pace world in which we all live in makes it hard to slow down and to ponder how our actions may end up impacting everyone we meet; we often forget to show gratitude to people who have helped us; and we often don't take time to see if our words or actions have hurt someone. When someone hurts us, while not always the case, we can still assume most of the time that the person who hurt us really did not mean to. They were just too busy or caught up in their own world to see how their words or actions hurt us.

Another thing to remember is that the "issue is not always the issue." Sometimes people use surface level actions in order to address deeper issues. For example, people who often go around pointing out other people's faults often do so because they want to appear better by tearing others down or they want people looking at another person and not at them for fear that their weaknesses will be seen.

I can remember one time that I was presenting the Church's teaching on immigration and after Mass a person verbally attacked me. As I let him talk, I realized that he was not mad at me but he was rather upset because of a friend of his had been in a car accident caused by a man who had no insurance because he was an illegal immigrant.

Victimize

Believing that you're the victim will only impose your bad attitude on others. Constant victimizing will cause you to feel powerless and weak, when in truth if you release yourself from the victim persona - you'll be more powerful than you ever imagined.

If there is one change that I have made in my life that has benefited me the most it is that I no longer see myself as a victim. It used to be when bad things happen to me, I would simply sit there and cry about life not being fair. Now when bad things come my way, I see them as opportunities to show how strong I am, to demonstrate my faith, and to help others by my example. There are cases in life when someone may be a legitimate victim of a crime but many people today wear the "victim" label over such little things as the store not having the item they wanted, Mass running overtime, a sibling getting more attention than them, etc.

I recently met a young teen age girl who had a disability that kept her in a wheelchair. She did not see herself as a victim of her disability but rather she took it upon herself to be a source of joy to the people around her. She was the loudest one when it came to cheering her campmates on the climbing wall. She then impressed her all when without the use of her legs climbed the rock wall a good six feet in the air. I know that when I began to feel down about myself, I will think about her and be inspired to carry on. With God all things are possible. With Jesus I am a victor and not a victim.

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August 20, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

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I love the movie *Star Wars: Empire Strikes Backs* for many reasons. The scenes in which Yoda teaches Luke about the ways of the Force, I find personally fool of wisdom. For example at one point in the movie, Yoda places a huge task before Luke and even before Luke makes an effort he resigns himself to defeat to which Yoda quickly replies **“Do. Or do not. There is no try.”** Luke, convinced that the task before him is impossible makes a half-hearted attempt. He is then amazed when Yoda is able to complete the task: **This is Yoda being brutally honest with Luke, who breathlessly says, “I don’t believe it,” after his Master raises an X-wing from the Dagobah swamp. It’s a definitive statement that comes from Yoda’s years and years of experience as a Jedi and a teacher, and it cuts through both to Luke and the audience.** This little scene from the movie demonstrates the power of negative thinking. (Quotes from my counseling handout will be in bold and my commentary will be in regular font)

Negative Thinking

Everyone, at some point in their life, has suffered a tragedy or overcame an obstacle that seemed impossible.

Allowing those low periods forever effect your thinking process will drive others away. No one wants to surround themselves with negativity because it is toxic. Pessimistic thinking takes more energy than a positive mind frame.

I will spend hours working with someone, if I think that they are giving it their all. On the other hand, I have very little patience for someone who approaches a task convinced that they will never succeed. A friend of mine was convinced that he would never be able to operate a computer and thus any attempt to show him was a waste of time. Imagine my surprise when a few months later, I saw him walking around with a laptop. He told me that he had saw another friend of his using one and he figured that if that friend could use a computer then he could. The key to his success therefore was the attitude he brought to the task before him.

People always want to be around people who will lift up their spirit and encourage them to be better. No one wants to be around a pessimist. If you discover that you are constantly being negative and driving people away let me suggest that you first begin by simply being quiet. Just because you feel negative about a situation does not mean that you have to express it. Second, try to see why other people in your situation have a sense of a hope or a reason to be optimistic. Finally develop a sense of gratitude. When you realize everything is a blessing from God then you begin to realize how blest you are and that begins to show.

Lack of Self-Control

There will be times when your patience is spread thin however this should not be the norm. Having a lack of self-control can bring on embarrassing situations - uncontrollable crying over small incidents, screaming at someone over spilled milk or getting upset over a mild over sight. A lack of self-control will bring up concerns for the people around you because they will not want to be an accessory to your behavior.

Here are some things to practice in order to help you grow in self-control.

1. *Look at the big picture.* - Ask yourself why the current situation bothers you. Most likely it is because you have forgotten that God loves you and will provide for you.

2. *Know the perils of inadequate sleep and stress.* - Our bodies and souls are connected. We need to make sure that we are well rested and find appropriate ways to deal with the stress that builds up in our bodies.

3. *Relax already.* - Soothe yourself, remind yourself that no matter what happens. God will still provide people in your life who love you for who you are.
4. *Do some short bouts of exercise.* - Exercise can help release endorphins and give you a sense of accomplishment.
5. *Know yourself.* - Know what your triggers are and what the temptations are that you face most often and develop a plan of action to combat them.
6. *Avoid Impermanent* - Keep command of your senses (and your tongue). Don't let a foreign substance rob you of your mental filter.
7. *Enjoy the positive things going on* - Take time to remind yourself of all the good things that you have going on in your life and all the great relationships God has given you. There is always something to be grateful for.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

August 27, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Toxic Behaviors

I was recently talking with a friend about this month's spiritual ponderings topic about Toxic behaviors. He responded to me by quoting Martin Luther King Jr: "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend." I immediately knew that my friend was on to something. Love is wanting what is best for another person even if it requires a sacrifice on my part and Jesus commands us to love ourselves within the context of the Law of Love. Improving our lives by making the sacrifices necessary to overcome these toxic behaviors should therefore be an important part of the life of every Christian. Two more toxic behaviors to confront, remember the quotes from the handout are in bold and my commentary is in regular font.

Superficial

Being overly judgmental will only force people to judge you because of your superficial nature. It's not fair to judge others with scrutiny. Some people only choose to show others a side that they want to see - this can go both ways, therefore it is not wise to pass judgment on others.

The following quote from Mother Teresa comes to mind every time I think about judging other people. "If you judge people, you have no time to love them."

I also think of an interview that Michael Bay the director of the Transformers movies gave. In this interview he explained that he personally limited the dialogue of the evil robots in his first movie because he realized in his own life that people become less scary the more we hear them speak. When I find people whom I want to judge and dismiss right away, I remember Michael Bay's insight and I try to listen to them. Most of the time, I discover that there is nothing to be scared of or that they are nothing like I thought they would be.

Cruelty

Cruelty stems from a lack of empathy and compassion for others. Tearing people down is not the right way to treat people. In the long run cruelty, backstabbing, and hurting others for any reason will hurt you. People enter your life for a reason, do not treat them cruelly and push them away.

When I was growing up, I worked in a pizza place where my manager would instruct us to work with the customer until he or she started to cuss. If the customer started to cuss then according to the manager we had a right to hang up on the customer or walk away. It was my manager's philosophy that no one ever deserved to be cussed at or threaten. I, think he was on to something.

In my own life there are a few people who from time to time think that the best way for them to get what they want is to be intimidating and mean. I guarantee that these people do not get what they want from me but instead they simply get me to pray for them that they will see that their temper will not get them what they want.

I have also come to realize that it takes more strength to do things in a loving way instead of resorting to force. St. Frances de Sales put it this way: "Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength."

One last thought, I have come to believe that people are like turtles in that you have to make them feel safe if you want them to come out of their shells. It is therefore good to avoid any form of violence or cruelty when dealing with another person.

Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.