

INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

Saint Francis de Sales Oratory, Saint Louis, MO

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Seven Deadly Sins Sermon Series – Lust

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How to speak of the Unspeakable Vice

At that time Jesus took Peter and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: and He was transfigured before them. And His face did shine as the sun: and His garments became white as snow.

Some of you have been following this series of sermons very closely. The list has been published, so there is no surprise concerning which of deadly sins I'm going to speak about today. But perhaps one or two of you are surprised that I did not begin by quoting today's epistle. Today St. Paul speaks in very clear terms about our subject. But this is Transfiguration Sunday, and I prefer to begin with the beautiful image of today's Gospel: that brief moment on Mount Thabor, where Our Lord is transfigured before His closest circle of disciples. Before taking these same three disciples with him to Mount Olivet, where they will see Him in His agony, He grants them the grace to look on Him for one moment in His glory, all resplendent and pure. The scene calls to mind the words of the psalmist: *who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord; or who shall stand in His holy place? The innocent of hands, and pure of heart.*

You may recall that, in our program, we now are in the midst of the four most human of the capital vices. The last of these, greed, is a vice which man does not share with any other creature in the universe – he keeps it all for himself. But you'll hear enough on this subject next week from my dear classmate. Today we must consider the last and worst of the three sins which remind us of what we have in common with the lower creatures. Animals are not capable of sin, but man is capable of becoming a beast.

Before I speak about this sin, I must ask myself, *should I speak about it at all?* This is the sin of which the Apostle said, *let it not so much as be named among you.* Our fallen world does little else but speak about it, morning, noon, and night. We have been told for several generations that we must speak about it openly and often, that talking about it is the honest and mature thing to do. In the last fifty years our courts have struck down nearly every law on the books which stood in the way of this sin – in images, words, or deeds. And as for our armed forces, not only are brave soldiers and military chaplains forced to confront the most unnatural and detestable vices, they are now forbidden to speak against them.

You and I, at least, are still free to say what we like. And surely we have a duty to speak out – the salvation of souls is at stake. Our Lady of Fatima said more souls go to hell because of this sin than for any other reason. But what can we say? Those who advertise and glamorize this sin love to hear Christians talk about it, even if we speak against it. The

victory is theirs; all that matters is that their ideas, their images, their vocabulary implant themselves in our hearts.

The greatest spiritual authors insist that our strategy for combating this sin in our own soul must be different from the tactic we employ against the others. It is good to stir ourselves up by staring our sloth, our envy, our anger, our gluttony in the face. Here we must stop short. We do not make progress by spending time reflecting on the ugliness and shamefulness of this sin; on the contrary, we risk contaminating ourselves even further. We must strive never to think of it at all – St. Ignatius tells us that in this battle, it's the coward who takes the field. That is why I am determined not to give this sin any air time today – the less air we give it, the sooner we will snuff it out. But even without speaking directly of it, I can provide you with three sovereign remedies for it. These three remedies apply to everyone, but each is intended for a particular sort of people. What these three groups of people have in common is that they all desire to be pure.

The first remedy I have in mind, then, is primarily for those who have lost their innocence and are mired in this sin. They want to regain the angelic virtue, but they are unable to feel contrition and make the good confession which will start them down that road. To them I repeat my earlier warning: do not spend time trying to reflect on the ugliness of this sin. Meditate instead on the Four Last Things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Eternity is coming closer every day, and this sin is devouring the time that remains to you. It may be deafening the ears of your heart to your vocation in life. It may be keeping you from the happy married life which otherwise would have been yours. *Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.* Our good God promises love and forgiveness for those who turn to Him; He does not promise tomorrow.

Secondly, there are those who have returned to God. They are now fighting this sin, and they are resolved to avoid the occasions of it. The first remedy may have helped them thus far, but now they may begin to apply in earnest the second remedy: control of the senses. The devil wreaks havoc on the human race by his exploitation of the senses, especially the sense of touch. Even before the occasions of sin present themselves, we must rise early and take the field by reminding our senses that it is our will that rules the soul. Always maintain good posture, especially in God's house, but everywhere else as well, even when alone. Always take the time to dress carefully and correctly. Remember the good, Catholic way of enjoying food which we have so recently heard about from the pulpit. At least try to limit your daydreaming, and shun all forms of curiosity with wandering eyes, ears and hands.

Finally, there are those who, by the grace of God, have never lost their innocence, or if they lost it, they have, through prayer and penance, returned to the happy society of pure souls. These souls must never cease to apply and reapply the first and second remedies. But for them, and for all of us, there is a third medicine. We must never cease to nourish our souls by considering the joys and the glories of the virtue of chastity. Whether we look to the school of prayer that is the religious life, to the boundless zeal of holy priests and missionaries, or to the love and generosity of spouses, we find in the hearts of all those who are pursuing the devout life a quiet virtue which gently reminds them that, although they are body and soul, they are soul before body.

I would like to close with a word to all parents here. I know how earnestly you all labor to preserve this great virtue in your households. I know that you cherish your children's innocence, and that you would defend it with your very lives. Do not lose heart! Continue to fight the good fight of faith! I know well that you are ridiculed, that the world mocks you every day. *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.* You and your children have a gladness, a youthfulness, an indomitable strength which the world can never know. May St. Joseph, great lover of chastity, grant us the grace to serve Jesus and Mary with unspotted minds and hearts, so that, when this short life is finished, we may be counted worthy to ascend the Lord's holy mountain, and find the joy which He promised us in that Sermon on the Mount: *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*