

Seven Capital Sins, Seven Lenten Virtues

By **Vladimir Mauricio-Perez** March 9, 2023 (<https://denvercatholic.org/seven-capital-sins-seven-lenten-virtues/>)

The capital or deadly sins were not named for being unforgivable or because of their gravity, but because they are the sins that give rise to other sins. We all fall victim to these capital sins that drive us away from Jesus. Thankfully, Christ gives us the antidote in the form of the capital virtues. It is impossible for us to grow in holiness and true virtue with our own strength, but God wishes to bestow his grace on us as we cooperate with him by actively rooting out all disordered passions and practicing virtue. This Lent, we invite you to identify the capital sin that drives you away from God the most and battle against it by practicing the opposite virtue. The following guide is intended to help you identify and choose that virtue and practice it in different ways. It is also meant to complement the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, confession and communion.

Humility (Pride)

Pride can be described as a disordered appreciation of ourselves. This sin can become evident in acts of vanity or boasting about our looks, intelligence, possessions, etc., to claim superiority over others. We can decrease our pride by increasing our humility. Humility is not about having low self-esteem or disregarding our gifts and abilities. It's about truth, acknowledging who God is and who we are, and putting him at the center of our lives. As C.S. Lewis put it, "humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less." Here are a few resolutions proposed by Mother Theresa:

Speak as little as possible about yourself.

Accept small inconveniences with good humor.

Don't dwell on the faults of others.

Give in, in discussions, even if you're right.

Chastity (Lust)

In a society with heavily sexualized marketing and instant access to explicit content, disordered actions of sexuality abound. However, lust can go beyond mere sexual overindulgence; lust can also manifest itself in an overindulgent desire for temporal goods. Chastity is the best way to counter the lustful tendencies that exist within our broken humanity. Chastity is defined as "*the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his body and spiritual being.*" How do we reach that integration and unity? Here are a few resolutions that can help in the painstaking process:

Be faithful to prayer: Set up a specific time every day and consider it a priority.

Fast from something you really like.

Write down the occasions that have led you to sin and resolve to avoid them.

Pick up a good hobby instead of being idle.

Use your phone only when necessary or limit social media use significantly (to 10 minutes a day?)

Generosity (Avarice)

As Christians, we are called to be generous — to give of ourselves in love for our neighbors. Generosity is the how we best counter avarice, also known as greed and covetousness, which is a disordered desire for material possessions, including power. So how can we do more of that this Lent? Here are a few no-brainers. And who knows? You might be surprised by how doing these will make a profoundly positive impact on your overall state of being:

Give to a parish/charity "until it hurts," as Mother Teresa used to say.

Do not cut corners in your work or responsibilities.

Fill your heart with Jesus — go to adoration at least one hour a week.

Be hospitable with your visitors — find joy in giving.

Meekness (Anger)

One of the Beatitudes reads, "*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*" Meekness is the best way to counter anger. The Catechism defines anger as "*a desire for revenge,*" that is, desiring vengeance to do evil to someone. There is, of course, righteous anger, which is not bad, but we often struggle with

the not-so-righteous one. Meekness should not be confused for weakness; rather, it is the virtue that helps us keep possession of ourselves during adversities. Here are a few ways to increase our own meekness this Lent:

Don't get caught up in other people's own anger — focus on yourself and how you can respond.
Use your anger to better yourself and strengthen your resolve to grow in virtue.
Try to avoid social media and other occasions that give rise to unhealthy anger.
If you do get angry, take a minute; don't react right away. Ask the Lord for patience and visualize yourself responding the way you would like to.

Gratitude (Envy)

Envy is the sin of being saddened or distressed at another's well-being because we think it takes away from our own excellence or makes us less lovable. This, of course, is a lie and trap from the devil which is quite easy to fall into. However, by practicing the virtue of gratitude, we can very quickly change our mindset and learn to see our life and everything we have as a gift from God above. Increase your gratitude by doing the following:

Enter into the presence of God and remember that that he loves you uniquely and unconditionally.
This alone is where your worth lies.
Open your eyes to the abundance of blessings in your own life — make a list and revisit it daily.
Count the blessings you encounter every day and thank God for each one.
Work on pointing out, congratulating and rejoicing in others' accomplishments and efforts.
Pray for the person you feel envy towards, that God may lead both them and you to holiness.

Temperance (Gluttony)

Although it's not bad to find pleasure in a delicious meal, *"it is a defect to eat like beasts,"* as St. Alphonsus Liguori put it. This, of course, includes overindulging in food or drink, but also doing it too soon, too expensively, too eagerly or too daintily, according to St. Thomas Aquinas. This vice is defeated by the virtue of temperance, which allows us to control our natural appetite for pleasure and enjoy whatever we do in accord with reason. A few ideas to acquire it:

Practice fasting twice a week, eating one full meal and two smaller meals that don't equal the big meal.
Moderate your food consumption — don't eat between meals.
Abstain from the ingredient/food you like the most.
Get used to saying "no" to things you don't really need, especially at the store or online.
Eat slowly and pray before and after your meals.

Diligence (Sloth)

The sin of sloth — often referred to as acedia, laziness or boredom — is a type of sadness or unwillingness to do something that is physically or spiritually good because of the work it requires. The best way to remedy this vice is through diligence, the virtue that enables us to be attentive to our actions so that they are aligned toward the good. We can practice true leisure and work on consistency in tandem with being diligent. The saints accomplished what they did because they were diligent and loved. A few ideas to grow in diligence:

We imagine often what we desire, and desire what we imagine often. So, work on letting Jesus become the center of your imaginations. Imagine him calling you by your name.
Plan your leisure time, especially on Sundays. It's not idleness or laziness, but rather enjoying an activity that nurtures your humanity and is not meant for utility: learn to play an instrument, read a book you actually enjoy, practice a sport, do a family activity, go to the museum, etc.
Offer up your suffering for an intention, especially when you feel like you have to drag yourself to accomplish it.
Wake up as soon as your alarm goes off. If you give yourself time to think about it, you've already lost.