

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is a period of reflection, repentance and renewal, so it is not a bad idea during this season to reflect on the classic seven deadly sins.

The sins are called deadly because, given the circumstances, intentions, and knowledge, they may be mortal sins. A mortal sin is deadly because it turns our heart away from God and his love. Remember there are three conditions for a sin to be mortal: It must be grave matter—in other words, by its nature it alienates us from God. Secondly, we must know and understand that the sin is grave matter and thirdly, we must choose that sin freely and with pre-meditation. In other words, there must be—even just a moment—when we consider whether to commit the sin or not, and then choose to do it anyway.

Please remember that there is a difference between committing a mortal sin and being in a state of mortal sin. If you commit a mortal sin, as soon as you are aware of it, turn your heart back to the LORD with the intention of going to confession. When you do this you are no longer in a state of mortal sin because you have already repented and turned to the Lord. Going to confession seals that act of contrition and administers absolution. Being in a *state* of mortal sin means you have not only committed a mortal sin, you have decided it doesn't matter, you don't intend to repent, and have no intention of giving up that sin. To be in that state of mortal sin is truly a disaster for your soul.

The tradition of naming seven deadly sins comes from the early monastic traditions of spirituality. The monk Evagrius Ponticus in the fourth century named "Eight Evil Thoughts". In the fifth century another pioneer of monasticism—St. John Cassian furthered and refined the eight evil thoughts, and in the sixth century Pope St. Gregory the Great—himself a Benedictine monk—honed the list down to seven deadly sins, and in the thirteenth century St. Thomas Aquinas refined them further to the list we know today.

Over the weeks of Lent this year in my pastor's letters I will write on the seven deadly sins and end by emphasizing the virtues that counter them—remembering that avoiding sin is only half the spiritual battle. The other half is cultivating virtue.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker