



ON THE QUESTION OF DEPRESSION

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“Sadness hath killed many, and there is no profit in it.”
– Eccles 30:25

Today more than ever, perhaps given the situation in the world, on a global scale, of the growth of materialistic greed and selfish, we have seen a great increase in the great harm done to people's minds and hence to peoples overall mental well-being.

The fast pace society in which we live, coupled with the overemphasis on personal image and the need to ‘feel good’ all the time has lead people to have an over exaggerated consideration of themselves. As a consequence, the wound of original sin is only deepened as men's pride and selfishness expands often leading them down the stark path of sorrow and affliction.

The problem seems to be one of sadness. The passion of sadness is particularly dangerous if it's not kept in check because it can cause the serious damage to the body¹. In speaking of the impact that sorrow has on the person as a whole St. Thomas Aquinas notes that “Of all the soul's passions, sorrow is most harmful to the body. The reason of this is because sorrow is repugnant to man's life in respect of the species of its movement, and not merely in respect of its measure or quantity, as is the case with the other passions of the soul.”²

St. Thomas points out that since man is one composite reality, both body and soul, his emotions tend to have a major impact on him and the way he deals with things, even upon his overall outlook on things³.

Our Passions

All the passions have an effect on the body, that's what distinguishes them as passions. We go red with anger, our legs shake from fear, our heart beats faster from love and so on. The problem with passion is it's not an exhilarating passion, which we'd obviously be quite aware of. There's no beating heart or rush of adrenalin or whatever. It just causes that sickening feeling, that apathy and lethargy and so on. That's not very passionate, you might think. Well, in fact it is, it's just not what is generally considered to be a passion. The reason for this is that many passions are linked to something which we recognise as being good. Sadness, like the other negative passions is linked to something we recognize as an evil. Thus positive passions like love or joy, which are linked to something which is perceived as being good, tend to make us feel excited or happy. In fact all this is part of the sensitive appetite. What's that? Well, it's the part of the soul which is affected, the philosophers say it is moved by sensitive things - things

we can register with our senses. So we enjoy listening to music, perhaps passionately. We get angry when we see or hear certain things. A certain type of smell sets our pulse racing and so on. These passions can be used for good and are only harmful if they are carried to excess or indulged to excess. It's question of degree.

Now, the negative passions are not only harmful when carried to a excessive degree but in themselves they actually shut down motivation, not only in the soul but even in the body. Thus when you are sad you can even get sick. People often talk of getting depressed. It's even considered to be a medical condition that can be treated with drugs. And in a way, you see, it is a medical condition since the movement of the passions, particularly sadness and despair, actually cause a detrimental effect on the body. We often notice if we have a pain in our body, let's say the tooth or a headache, this pain distracts from what we're doing. Now you can imagine what happens if this pain is in our very soul. Since the passion is caused by a present evil in the soul, it has a negative effect on the will and actually depresses the soul, inasmuch as it hinders it from enjoying anything. This may be acute enough to even paralyse people. Certainly the lesser the perceived chance of escaping the evil that is bothering you, the greater the depression and the more hopeless the chances of getting out of it since it is precisely the will which is paralysed.

Sorrow undermines our hope

With this in mind we can then begin to understand the fact that once we begin to get discouraged and walk the path of depression, we begin to slowly and slowly to run the risk of losing the virtue of hope, which itself often leads us away from sacraments and God Himself eventually, since sorrow leads us to lose heart and forget the goodness of God in whom we place all of our hope. And so if this sadness is not kept in check, there is a real danger of eventually losing the other virtues of the faith and Charity. And as a logical consequence we run the risk of losing our souls.

In speaking of sins against hope St. Thomas Aquinas points out in that “As regards their effect on us sins against hope are more dangerous than sins against faith or charity, for when hope dies we lose heart and flounder in wickedness.”⁴

And so what is then the major cause of this sorrow that leads so many into depression?

be seen in those who through sorrow become a prey to melancholy or madness”. - Summa Theo. II – I. Q. 37. Art. 4. Ad. 3.

⁴ Summa Theol. II-II, Q. 20. Art. 3.

¹ "Of sadness comes death." - Eccclus. 38:19

² Summa Theo. II – I. Q. 37. Art. 4.

³ In Speaking on this St. Thomas states: “Sorrow too sometimes deprives man of the use of reason: as may

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Primary Cause: The great focus upon self-coupled with over emphasis on personal comfort ⁵

The great focus upon self today has meant that so many don't live in reality, but rather live a life where reality is meant to conform to their own image so that anything that doesn't conform to their own ideas and views often leaves them quite miserable.

People have become so taken up with self and their own image that if in any way they have to suffer a misfortune at the hands of others, the fear of it happening or the fact that it is actually happened to them tends to be something all-consuming to the point of insanity or at least to the point of leaving them down in the dumps, so to speak.

And as a consequence we can often be plagued by those thoughts that promote groundless fear and discouragement; thoughts which recall in a disturbing way the poor decisions and failures of the past; worrisome thoughts concerning the future; thoughts of persons and situations closely associated with unhappy and unpleasant memories.

The best way to counteract such thoughts is to seek engender thoughts of hope⁶, and courage.

What is the Solution to this problem?

There are natural remedies to sorrow, since it is a natural passion. Any kind of pleasure will lessen the effects of sorrow and therefore stimulate the will to get out of the rut. There are so many pleasures, many of them licit, so the picture is not so dark.

Solution: -

Since Man is both body and Soul – The Solution set forth will be two fold; Spiritual and Material.

Spiritual.

First: To know how to suffer well.

“I will glory in nothing but in my infirmities” – 2 Cor 12:5

⁵ Here I in no way try to deny that some cases of depression are purely medical condition, but for the greater part the cause is a spiritual one and needs to be remedied at its primary cause. I will also discuss but purely secondarily some physical remedies.

⁶ Summa Theol. II-I Q. 32. Art. 3.

Christ and the Gospel. – The works of Mercy/Corporeal and spiritual.⁷

The works of mercy especially that of alms is powerful before God to obtain many graces and blessings. – It helps us also to think of others and works then as a thing that helps us learn detachment and confidence in God, who will provide for us.

Those who fall into depression often have a deep lack of trust or confidence in God and as a consequence their life tends to be filled with empty fears about what might happen, or what others might say or think about them etc.

It is important for us to remember the difficult but nonetheless true doctrine that all that befalls us in life comes to us from God. We tend to personalise our problems and become engrossed with hatred or depression about things that have befallen us as a result of the actions of others or various circumstances, and yet we must remember God allows these things to happen to us for a great good. All things work to good to them that love God. (Also important to remember “Our Struggle is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and those in high places).

Prayer and Meditation.

Ultimately our help and strength are in God and so to Him we must turn with confidence, seeking to consider His goodness and Mercy.

The growth in knowledge and most of all in knowledge of Divine things (by the consideration any of the beautiful treasures of our faith) is often sufficient points out St. Thomas to help us to move from sorrow to Joy⁸.

Material: Other Helps, remedies/Medicine. (Only in Moderation).

Clean out the filter; - Sometimes when a filter is clogged up it can have a backing up effect. This is the case with the Kidneys in the body which plays an important function in purifying things in the system for this reason it needs to be maintained⁹.

⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas also points out how doing good to others has an effect of bring us joy. - Summa Theol. II-I Q. 32. Art. 6

⁸ Summa Theol. II-I Q. 32. Art. II. & Art. VIII.

⁹ In general it would seem that looking after the health of the major organs can be of considerable help in dealing with this issue. As previously stated however, at the core of the issue is self mastery and not simply a question of 'good health'.

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Here I will quote the great neurologist Dr. Wagner-Jauregg who stated that in his assessment 'two thirds of all mentally ill would not go to a mental home had they healthy kidneys.'¹⁰

Some Sleep – We need to take our rest. God made us such and so we must acknowledge this and take the rest we need. The saying "Sleep on it" has its value especially when we are anxious about something.

Some good music – Classical Music, Gregorian Chant or something that puts us at peace without arousing the emotions inordinately, while uplifting the soul.

A change of environment can help at times. – Take some time out. – "A change is as good as a holiday" – However at times a change can make things worse so prudence needs to be used here.

Another danger here is that such person in the state of sorrow, often tend to take time off or take a holiday only to think about their own (imaginary or real) misfortune and so this can at times prove to be counterproductive.

Singing – In singing we lift up our hearts. David often rejoiced when he would sing and play his harp before God. Singing can help us to move out of selves, especially if we have a musical talent of some sort.

O God, I will sing to thee with the harp, thou holy one of Israel." – Psalm 70:22

Prayer – The Presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

"I remembered God, and was delighted." - Ps. 76:4

Thinking/Meditating on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, is a great source of Strength and consolation.

How all things turn to good to them that love God. How when all seems lost, it is not so, but rather it is only the beginning indeed. God's ways are not our ways.

Sufferings, trials, failures, are God's ways of making great things of us. Think for example how our own sufferings can be a source of strength for others in as much as we now know how to be compassionate to those who suffer basing it on our own afflictions.

Silent prayer. – True is the saying, that when we are sick (Mental or Physical) it is difficult to pray. So sometimes, just sitting there in God's presence in the Church is enough. Just going to Our Lord as Child who sits at the feet of his parents and feels security and love

so we must do likewise, knowing that we turn to the Sacred Heart who is the real remedy for our problems.

A deep devotion to the Holy Ghost – The comforter

The Popes and Saints have often lamented the fact that so many Catholics tend to go through life ignorant of the Holy Ghost and His power in Our Lives. Our Lord refers to the Holy Ghost as Him as "the comforter"¹¹ and "the spirit of Truth"¹² who will give us the counsel and guidance we need in our times of trial and difficulty to help us come out of ourselves and help us to take up the trial with a generous spirit rather than to remain down cast as though the weight of the world were upon our shoulders. It is He who can fill our heart with that joy that Our Lord tells us that "no man shall take from you"¹³.

Sacraments

Regular reception of the Blessed Sacrament and confession.

The Regular reception of confession should serve as a source of encouragement, while the Blessed Sacrament will act as the source of our strength to persevere despite how we may feel.

The Rosary – Turning to the Blessed Mother.

We all need a Mother. And so God has given us one, His very own one. No better or more perfect mother then can we have than the Mother God Himself Chose for His Own Son. The Mother of Sorrow and Mother of the Church; the refuge of sinners; refuge of the afflicted.

For anyone who has ever been sick surely there is no more consoling thing to know that mother is there looking after you. And indeed this is what God Himself has assured us in the words He spoke to St. John.

We all these things we stand armed with the weapons we need to go forward courageously and leave behind self-made prison of depression. And go forward we must, for here below as members of the Church, the Mystical Body of Church, we are called to be militant. There is no time in this short life for discouragement, depression, no, we have God with us, and so who can be against us!

Courage and Confidence in God who abandons none!

“ Be nothing solicitous: but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be

¹⁰ Health through God's Pharmacy, by Maria Treben, pg. 22.

¹¹ John 16:7

¹² John 15:26

¹³ John 16:22

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made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” - Philippians 4: 6

Confidence, delivers us from worldly cares. "The heathens," says Our Lord, "seek after all these things", Yes, this Confidence in God, must give us courage and strength in all temptations. Our life upon earth is "a warfare," says the Job. We have enemies within and without; for the world, the flesh, and the devil, are waging a continual war against us, and using all their snares to draw us into sin and hell.

Surely it is we who forsake God and not He us, or why else does Our Lord call Himself the Good Shepherd. Then with this confidence and trust in him we must go forward with Courage and generosity of soul.

Then is what will lead us forth in the battle that we have to fight to attain salvation, for "The Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, but the violent bear it away." The violent, the Christian must fight courageously against self, the conquest of self is the battle ground for salvation and the remedy to our difficulties.

Our Lord constantly reassures us in scripture: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."¹⁴, "*Why are you fearful?*";¹⁵ "*Have confidence, I have overcome the world.*"¹⁶

Let us not worry about tomorrow, but rather take St. Paul as our model, who said well "I can do all things with Him who strengthens me."

¹⁴ John 14: 27

¹⁵ Matt. 8:26

¹⁶ John 6:33