

Roadblocks: Acedia

Psalm 91

Today's sermon is on the vice of *acedia*. It's a carelessness or lethargy of the soul - what early monks and nuns living in desert monasteries called the *noonday devil*. Early in the morning these desert fathers and mothers would wake up full of energy and enthusiasm to continue in their task of prayer and worship, full of excitement at the prospect of encountering God and being transformed by him. But as the day wore on, the desert heat set in and a full belly lulled their senses, their enthusiasm started to wane. In the morning, the excitement of meeting with God fuelled their devotion; now faced with the desert heat (and the difficulty of staying awake after lunch), they just didn't care as much. Their minds started to wonder, and the temptation set in: maybe this wasn't the best way to connect with God, maybe there was something different – something more interesting and easier – they should be doing.

Certain people might struggle with certain vices more than others, but everyone faces acedia. We know that prayer, worship and devotion will lead to transformation and fulfilment, but as life goes on, we struggle to care. It would be easier just to watch TV, or do something a little more engaging like start a new job or take on a new project. We can think that the answer to acedia is try something new to get ourselves interested again – a new church, a new way to worship etc. – but it doesn't work. It just leads to more restlessness. Acedia is dealt with through loving stability – by remaining committed to a church family and the habit of worshipping together even when it feels dry.

If you struggle to care about union with God or transformation, you're not alone. Acedia plagues the human race. Be assured, however, if you stand firm and persevere, there will be great fruit.

Questions for group discussion

1. What stood out to you in the message?
2. Have there been times when spiritual practises have come easily to you (with great excitement)? Have there been other times where you struggled with motivation?
3. How can you respond?