

What Are the Seven Deadly Sins?

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The seven deadly sins have intrigued people throughout the centuries, even inspiring a 1995 movie starring Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt. However, it was the medieval poet, Dante, who gave the list of the infamous seven sins.

While they are referred to commonly as the deadly sins, they are formally called the “capital sins.” Why capital or deadly? These sins are like constructing a wall between oneself and God. Discipleship is relational: loving the Triune God and loving one another. These capital sins rupture one’s relationship to God and one another.

Secondly, these sins are contrary to virtues to which all Christians are called. Having been baptized into the life of Christ, all members of the Church—that is, disciples—are called to live as Christ calls us in word and sacrament. The preeminent virtues include: temperance, justice, fortitude, and prudence. Discipleship ideally is living according to Christ’s call to lives that embody God’s faithful love (which we call grace). Virtues become like a habit that are almost second nature—ultimately leading to cardinal virtues. The opposite is also true. Practicing small vices can ultimately lead to bigger and bigger vices, namely the deadly or capital sins.

The capital sins include, as taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth (#1866). Saint Augustine defined sin as “being curled in on oneself.” Sin, therefore, is putting the self ahead of others. Looking at this list of sins, they all put oneself, one’s needs, ahead of others.

The opposite of humility is pride. A sin of excess, pride boasts too much about oneself to the neglect of one’s neighbor and God.

Avarice, which also can mean greed, forsakes the virtue of justice, by depriving one’s neighbor of equitable resources. This includes stealing and hoarding goods.

Envy may seem harmless, because what is wrong with envying another’s luxury car or mansion? Envy as a deadly sin



is not admiring another person or their property but desiring those things or qualities for oneself, to such an extent that one loathes the person. Resentment grows, and a feeling of entitlement can lead to the other deadly sins of lust, greed, or wrath.

Anger that reaches the level of wrath turns violent. Anger in itself is something with which we all deal. Yet when we allow our anger to take charge of our lives, the result is violence, aggression, pain, and suffering.

Lust is obsessive craving to the point of addiction or even the breaking of commitments. God’s love is one that awakens within us the ability to cherish others, uphold their dignity as human persons,

respecting them and beholding them as subjects created in God’s very image and likeness. Lust supplants authentic love.

Eating or drinking too much is known as gluttony. In the feudal system of the Middle Ages, gluttony was interpreted as eating beyond one’s need, without care for those who are poor and starving. Like greed, gluttony lacks justice toward one’s neighbor.

Today, we tend to think of sloth as laziness or the “couch potato” who never does anything constructive. Laziness, in a spiritual sense, is not using all the gifts God has given us to build up the Church and the world. Our responsibility as the baptized is to further the mission Christ entrusted to the Church, and therefore laziness impedes our roles as members of the Church who use our gifts for the work of Christ.

While these deadly sins have been written about and even evoked the imagination for a movie, what is important is accepting God’s offer of life and love in our lives in order to be faithful disciples and virtuous persons.

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