

The Passions

Many of us think of *passion* as something that we should desire. If we are passionate about something, it means that we are driven with desire to fulfill the task at hand. The meaning of the word "passion" in the early Church meant "to suffer." When we speak of Christ's passion, we speak of his suffering during the events of his crucifixion.

Each of us are afflicted by certain passions that occurred after the fall of Adam and Eve. This is the disease that was passed down. Also from the word "passion" we also derive the word, "passive." The passions are sin sicknesses that have occurred in our hearts after the fall that feel so natural we can have them operate in our lives and we are its passive victim. Because of this, to be healed from them, we have to fight. We don't fight in our own strength, but in the Grace of Jesus Christ. It is still a fight, however, because healing from the passions feels very unnatural to us. But in fact, the effects of the passions in our life is quite unnatural. We were never created for this. Many of the passions feel natural and pleasurable to us, like [gluttony](#), pride, [lust](#), [anger](#), and avarice. But in reality, these things cause us to suffer and are pulling us away from God. We cannot serve two masters Christ teaches us. (Matt. 6:24)

"What a man loves, that he certainly desires; and what he desires, that he strives to obtain."

- Abba Evagrius, *Directions on Spiritual Training*

In this life, we either strive to obtain God, or we strive to obtain the things that are opposed to God and are controlling us. St. Innocent of Alaska (1879) wrote:

"Every individual instinctively strives for happiness. This desire has been implanted in our nature by the Creator Himself, and therefore it is not sinful. But it is important to understand that in this temporary life it is impossible to find full happiness, because that comes from God and cannot be attained without Him. Only He, who is the ultimate Good and the source of all good, can quench our thirst for happiness."

St. Innocent of Alaska, [Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven](#)

As pleasurable and deceptive as the passions are, we can be healed from them and find the eternal happiness that is in Christ. This process is often painful, but as St. Paul writes, *"for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (Rom. 8:18)

There are certain paths of healing for each type of passion. The Church fathers defined each of the passions and laid out the way of healing. St. John Cassian lays them out in this way:

gluttony

[fornication \(lust\)](#)

love of money (covetousness)

[anger](#)

dejection,

[despondency](#)

vainglory

pride

Out of these 8 main passions arise all other sins. The Church fathers assist us by defining these principle passion and the treatment for each. Evagrius was probably the first Christian write to identify the list.

Why a list you might ask? Why can't we just deal with each sin as it comes up. Let's consider a medical illness. Having a correct diagnosis that underlies an number of symptoms will help the

healer and the patient get to the root of the trouble. The passions are the roots of the trouble. Sometimes God allows the root to die systemically over time. Sometimes it feels as though we are just chopping down the top of the problem and not getting very far.

Here are some things to consider in you struggle against the passions.

1. The are easy to miss. Because passions are so "natural" and seemingly part of our nature they are easy to hold onto. We may hold onto anger because we feel justified. We may also hold onto it because "everybody gets anger." Overeating or gluttony seems common enough in the United States and other country the are blessed with abundance. But will God judge us any less when we indulge in a latte drink while others have nothing to eat. This may sound harsh, but look at the parable of the sheep and the goats. It is because "I was thirsty and you didn't give me anything to drink" that we might not be allowed into His Kingdom. It would seem quite unnatural to give up a latte drink for the rest our lives and give the money to the poor. [I don't want to say that latte's or anyone who drinks them is sinning more than myself. . .I haven't given them up, but have reduced them because of a change in my thinking. Each of us must be led by the Holy Spirit and directed by our priests, spiritual fathers and mothers to come to these conclusions and make a change in direction.] The point is . . . "see how unnatural that all feels. . . about giving up a latte." It is because it seems so normal. Most advertizing is centered around the passions. If one is shopping at the supermarket and is putting the groceries on the conveyor belt, you can almost play a game to see if they have left out any of the major passions. Lust is their most definitely. Delectable food, Food most glorious food (gluttony), Lottery tickets, how to make more money (Avarice/greed). Anger is represented by marital breakups, divorce, and who is against who. The glamour models and better ways to have sex and eating with no calories appeals to our envy and vainglory. Hollywood unfortutanely appeals the passions. Even "good" movies have elements of these sicknesses. This isn't to say that there isn't some good advertising for charitable causes or movies that inspire us to do good works. They are and Praise God for them. But the passions are subtle. So, we must be every vigilant, prayerful and open to criticism to learn what they are.

St. Isaac the Syrian said that it is a "greater miracle that a man can see his true self than the raising of the dead."

2. Passions are not so much eradicated but transformed. The Church saw passions as the distortion of the natural tendencies. Lust is an unnatural use of sexuality. Gluttony is an unnatural use or connection with food. Greed is the unnatural attachment with the material world. Envy is an unnatural need and want for what one does not have. The passion of anger is an unnatural form of anger. God, Himself can be angry, but obviously doesn't sin. We are called to not sin in our anger (Ephesians 4:26) Sloth or what we might call procrastination is an unhealthy form of 'rest' or 'letting go.' We must do some work to acquire healing from the passions. Some Christian writers thought that the passion of sloth might be as important as pride. Sloth is so powerful, you might know what to do to be saved, but you might do it too slowly, like the man who doesn't make it to the emergency room in time.

Since passions are unnatural to us, the healing first takes the form of being brought back to our natural state. Once we have acquired this, one's healing moves to the supra-natural state or "above" nature. (few people attain this natural state and fewer yet attain the supra-natural state in this life)

Like Jesus' statement about the weeds being left with the wheat and not pulled out immediately so as to not pull up some of the wheat with it, there seems to be a similar principle that the passions are slowly being healed and transformed to a more natural stated, than just ripped out of our lives.

3. Healing from the passions is a restoration process. A chapel ceiling with frescos that have been painted over can be restored to the original image with the help and expertise of a restoration artist. They may spend all day on on square inch. But they feel it it worth it. To do it any quicker will destroy the original image. The image may be 400 or 500 years old. The are restoring something that cannot be replaced.

Just like the ceiling, you cannot be replaced. There is going to never be another you. The sickness has affect you as well as everyone else. The only direction towards God is a restorative healing process. Unlike Western teaching that suggests that man is totally depraved and that his truest nature is sinful and wicked, the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church teaches that we are sick with the sickness of sin and the passions. Our true nature is to be well. To love God, to keep his commandments and live in all of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23) Why we don't have this is because of a sickness. How we attain it is through healing. It is difficult to understand how we can be restored in the Western tradition. If we are totally depraved with sin and that is our underlying nature, than what are we being restored to. It would have to involve obliteration. This is not correct teaching and it can lead many down the path to hopelessness and despair.

With correct teaching about these things it really affects how we fight this. If one is experiencing a lust problem, if he or she thinks that these thoughts are desires are their true nature, it is very difficult. The enemy also tempts and tricks the person into thinking that this is their true nature as well. But, if one sees that these things are not the real self, but just an illness, they will make progress.

When you experience a temptation to eat too much or foods that a drug like, realize that this is unnatural for us. This is part of our sickness.

When you experience lust, realize that these desires are part of the sickness. Pray immediately for God to restore you. Surrender your will to Him and He will guide your next through or your next meal.

When you get overly angry, realizing that this is sick and an unnatural response. Pray for the virtue of mildness.

4. Never measure your progress.
5. One can have passions come back.
6. Pride is the root of many of the passions.
7. Pray to acquire the virtues.

This article is under construction and will be finished soon. The last 4 sections will hopefully be finished by Jan 30, 2012. Please forgive us for any typos. Please contact us if the information doesn't reflect the teaching of the Church. Erik.

On The Passions from Elder Ephraim in the book, "*Counsels from the Holy Mountain*"

Struggle, my child, for God's road is narrow and thorny; not inherently, but because of our passions. Since we want to eradicate from our heart the passions, which are like thorny roots, so that we may plant useful plants, naturally we shall toil greatly and our hands will bleed and our face will sweat. Sometimes even despair will overcome us, seeing roots and passions everywhere!

But with our hope in Christ, the Repairer of our souls, let us diligently work at clearing the earth of our heart. Patience, mourning, humility, obedience, cutting off one's will -- all these virtues help cultivate it. We must apply all our strength, and then God, seeing our labor, comes and blesses it, and thus we make progress.

Take courage, for the toil is temporary and ephemeral, whereas the reward is great in heaven. Struggle and be vigilant with your thoughts. Keep a firm hold on hope, for this shows that your house is founded on the rock -- and the rock is our Christ.

Do not feed your passions by yielding to them, so that you do not suffer pain and affliction later! Labor now, as much as you can, because otherwise, if the passions are not tended to, in time they become second nature, and then try and deal with them! Whereas now, if you fight against them lawfully, as we advise you,

you will be freed and will have happiness by the grace of God.

The thing that should preoccupy us above all is how to cleanse our heart from the passions and how to abate some passion or vice! The visitations of grace that God sends us from time to time for consolation do not play an important role, because they come and go. Ah, those passions! They are like roots with thorns. How much toil, how much pain, what tears, what prayers are necessary for a person to find slight relief -- it is a real martyrdom!

I pray to the merciful God that He will show you the path of salvation and guide you as a hart to the springs of the living water of refreshment. Man is full of passions, shortcomings, etc., and in order to be freed of them, he must engage in a bloody battle. Once he wins, with God's help, he will receive here in this life the promise of the future marriage with the Lamb, Who was ruthlessly slaughtered by cruel hands accursed by God.

From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain," by Elder Ephraim, (Florence, Arizona: St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, 1999), pp. 163 - 164.

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