

The Greatest Story Ever Told

A Back-to-Basics Catechesis

The Life of Lot: A Study in Sloth

One of our greatest spiritual problems is sloth. Sloth, one of the seven deadly sins, is a sorrow, sadness, or aversion toward the good things God offers. Rather than being joyful and zealous to obtain these gifts, the slothful person sees them as too much trouble to obtain and is averse to the changes such gifts might introduce into his life. This is clearly the case with Lot, who resists the attempts of God to rescue him and his family from the sinful city of Sodom, which is about to be destroyed. Let's examine his struggle in several steps.

Roots - Lot's personal troubles were many, but for our purposes his problems began when he "pitched his tent toward Sodom" (Gen 13:12). Abraham and Lot had grown very rich (almost never a good thing in the spiritual life) and realized that their flocks were so large that one part of the land could not sustain them both. Thus, they agreed to live in different sectors. Abraham left the choice of areas to Lot, who (selfishly?) chose the better part for himself. The area where Sodom was is now a deep desert, but at that time the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the delta land of Egypt (Gen 13:10). And thus, it was that Lot took his family and "pitched his tent toward Sodom."

Risks - But Sodom was a wicked city, filled with false worship, greed, insensitivity to the poor, and the approval and practice of homosexuality. Here is the risk that Lot takes: he turns his face toward Sodom and willingly exposes his family to the grave moral threats there. And it does indeed affect them. Ultimately, as we shall see, his wife

cannot bear to leave, looks back, and is lost. His daughters escape, but later engage in the grave sin of incest. Lot, too, will find it hard to flee Sodom, finding God's offer to save him to be too much trouble. He'd rather stay, whatever the risk.

If you're going to swim in muddy water, you're going to get muddy. And that mud gets in your ears and in your soul. This is what Lot risks and what results when he pitches his tent toward Sodom.



Many of us, too, think little about the risks that television, the internet, music, and culture pose to us and our children. Too easily we risk our eternal salvation and that of our children by pitching our tent toward Sodom through easy commerce with a world that is poisonous to our faith. Even if some things are troublesome, many of us make little effort to draw back and limit, even in little ways, the influences that are contrary to our faith.

Resource - Lot has only one resource in his favor: Abraham is praying for

his ne'er-do-well nephew. He asks God's destroying angel to spare Lot and his family (see Gen 19). God agrees to this and acts to save Lot despite himself. Really, it's the only thing that saves Lot.

It is true that Lot was just, in the sense that he did not approve of the sin around him. (see 2 Peter 2:6-8) But neither did he act to really protect himself or his family from it. Something about Sodom appealed to him. Perhaps he thought he could make money there (or perhaps the trains ran on time). Whatever the benefits, Lot weighed them more heavily than the risks.

And so, too, for many today, who leave the TV or unfiltered Internet on no matter the risk because it entertains or has some other perceived benefit that outweighs the obvious risks. For many parents it's just too much trouble to monitor the websites their children visit or the music they listen to.

It really is only Abraham's prayers that save Lot. Thus, don't forget the power of prayer for some of the "ne'er-do-wells" you may know. God may act to save them before the Day of Judgment simply because you prayed for them.

Root Sin - But here comes the heart of the story: sloth. The angel warns, "Flee!" But Lot hesitates. Fleeing is hard work; it means leaving things behind that you like. Perhaps Lot thinks, "Maybe the warnings of destruction are overblown; maybe it won't really be so bad." Here is what the story says:

As dawn was breaking, the angels urged Lot on, saying, "On your way! Take with you your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of Sodom." When he hesitated, the men, by the LORD's mercy, seized his hand and the hands of his wife and his two daughters and led them to safety outside the city. As soon as they had been brought outside, he was told: "Flee for your life! Don't look back or stop anywhere on the Plain. Get off to the hills at once, or you will be swept away!" "Oh, no, my lord!" Lot replied, "You have already thought enough of your servant to do me the great kindness of intervening to save my life. But I cannot flee to the hills to keep the disaster from overtaking me, and so I shall die. Look, this town ahead is near enough to escape to. It's only a small place. Let me flee there—it's a small place, is it not?—that my life may be saved." "Well, then," he replied, "I will also grant you the favor you now ask. I will not overthrow the town you speak of. Hurry, escape there! I cannot do anything until you arrive there." That is why the town is called Zoar (Gen 19:15-21).

Lot has become so lazy and settled in with sin that he'd rather accept death than expend the effort to flee. Not only that, but he also can't even manage to rouse himself to save his family. It's all just too much trouble. Sloth is sorrow, sadness, or aversion at the good things God is offering, even escape from Hell.

Thanks to Abraham's prayers, the angels literally drag Lot and his family out of the city and repeat the warning: "Flee!" God who made you without you, will not save you without you. So, Lot must cooperate. But still, Lot sees it as all just too much trouble. In effect, he says, "Man, those hills look far away. And they're not nearly as nice as this valley. It's going to take a lot of effort to get there. Do I really have to go that far?"

And here is another aspect of sloth: compromising with evil despite the dangers. Even if it occurs to many that some things in their lives need to change, they try to minimize those changes. The Lord tells us that we cannot serve two masters, that we cannot serve both the world and Him. In other words, we must decisively choose God over the demands of this world whenever there is a conflict. But many, realizing that this may introduce uncomfortable situations or have financial impacts, begin to negotiate with their conscience, saying, "I'm basically serving God ... well, at least mostly. Maybe it's enough if I do a few holy things and serve God "for the most part." And then I can still serve the world and enjoy its fruits, too. After all I have a career and I don't want to risk a promotion. How about if I serve God 60% and the world 40%? Is that enough?"

Thank God for His mercy! (And thank Abraham for his prayers.) We are a real mess. As the text shows, God will take the little he can get from Lot, at least for now, to save him. But God shouldn't have to take this from us. Only grace and mercy can spare us from ourselves.

Results - But note this: grace and mercy need to have their effect. We cannot go on in sloth forever. We must allow God to heal this deep drive of sin in us or we will be destroyed. Lot is saved for now, but great tragedy is still in store for him. His wife turned back in longing for Sodom and was lost. His daughters cannot get Sodom out of them and will later turn to incest, inebriating their father and having sexual relations with him (Gen 19:30ff). And from this incest will be born the ancestors of the enemies who will later afflict Israel: the Moabites and the Ammonites.

And what of us today? What role have we played in pitching our tents toward Sodom? What happens to us

and to our children and grandchildren when all we do is express shock at the condition of the world but expend little real effort to protect ourselves from it or actively change it? What happens to us when we learn to live off the fruits of our Sodom, and make easy compromises with the world in terms of greed, insensitivity to the poor, and sexual confusion? What happens when God's plan to rescue us through the gifts of chaste living, generosity, and more simple living, is rejected as too much trouble or as requiring us to give up too many things that we like? Many think to themselves, "I know my favorite television show has bad scenes, but I like the story line, and I want to find out what happens at the end of the season. I know I should be clearer and firmer with my children, but that leads to conflict, and I hate conflict, and besides they'll complain if they can't have a smart phone. And it's so much trouble trying to monitor their Internet activity. And ... and ... and ..."

What happens when we do this, when we slothfully reject God's offer of sacraments, prayers and Holy Scripture? Well, we don't have to look far; we know what happens. We and the people we love get lost, wounded, corrupted, confused, and even die, both physically and spiritually.

The virtues opposed to sloth are zeal and joy. Zeal for God's truth and the beauty of holiness, and a joyful pursuit of the life God offers us are gifts to be sought. Sloth is very pernicious and has cumulative effects. We haven't done well, collectively speaking. It's time to turn more zealously to God, to appreciate the truth of what He has always taught. It's time to gratefully, joyfully study His ways, and live them and share them with others.

Here, then, is a study of sloth in the life of Lot, a lesson more necessary and urgent today than ever before.