

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Spiritual Paralysis: Causes, Cures"



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The Gospels are filled with story after story of how Jesus cured the physical ailments of men, women and children. According to Francis de Sales, even more important was the deeper healing that Jesus effected: the maladies of the soul.

Especially, what he calls "spiritual paralysis."

Of this spiritual paralysis, Francis de Sales believed that many people suffered from it without knowing it. And, since many are unaware of their affliction, fewer still look for a cure.

In a sermon he delivered in 1593, Francis presents us with an examination of the root causes of this spiritual paralysis...and he offers us a powerful way to remedy this spiritual malady.

"The root cause of paralysis of the soul is spiritual indifference: being content with continuing to live in sin. Such people no longer work to save their souls: they are no longer warmed by charity or clothed with virtues. This condition is very serious..."

"To guard against this paralysis, we need to be aware of its causes. They are numerous indeed, but they can be reduced to two common ones at the present time: feeble, flattering excuses for sinning, and a great lack of courage. Those who fall under the

first heading 'kid' themselves that there is nothing wrong with them. Although they are quite out of sorts, those who fall under the second heading would rather remain sick than experience the unpleasant taste of medicine."

Tough enough to offer people the cure for their illness when they seek to avoid the unpleasant side-effects, but even more challenging to suggest a remedy to those who deny that they are even sick!

Perhaps that is why Francis directs most of his attention to those who are aware of their spiritual flu but who loathe the treatment necessary to restore them to health. "So many people suffer from lack of courage: they don't try to be good or to avoid evil because it seems too difficult. Sinners put off going to confession: it is so irksome...Some people will only visit a doctor if they are carried there...But sins don't merely fall from the soul like rotten apples from a tree; no, the longer they hang there, the more difficult it is to remove them."

Francis offers us a challenge, the sound of which is quite familiar: "Already it is high time for us to wake from sleep. Christ our Lord stands at the door, knocking...Don't keep our Lord waiting when he offers the welcome of

his love...Don't think it too much trouble to put your soul in order and go to the sacraments. Of course confession is trying; of course you must make an effort to prepare for holy Communion..."

The most important initial step in regaining our spiritual agility is to accurately diagnose the nature of what ails us. "Let us all examine our consciences," recommends Francis, "to see if our souls show signs of being affected by this paralysis. Indifference is the danger to be avoided; being cold or lukewarm are symptoms of approaching paralysis."

Francis concludes: "What we need is warmth: something with which to set our hearts on fire. For some people meditation on our Lord's suffering will cure their coldness; for others, their own sufferings may help; for those already in the state of grace, there is the nourishment of the holy Eucharist. And for everyone, there is always the thought of hell fire to shake us out of our apathy."

"In any event, think well of what you are doing, and you will remain well along the right path to life..."

God, keep the fire of love burning in our hearts: love of you, love of self, love of others!