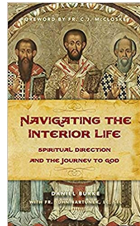
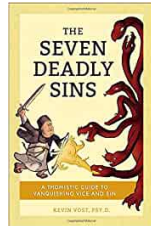


“WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE YOU SINNED?”

I want this Lent to be different from most. I want to be different. At the end of Lent 2021, I want to be a new creation. I recently watched a webinar with Dan Burke on Septuagesima and preparing for Lent. I started thinking...I don't want another humdrum Lent where it comes and goes and I am the same....committing the same patterns of sin. I want to dig down to the root and pull in out. I hate gardening, but there is something so satisfying about pulling some of those weeds that have “runners” as my husband tells me they are called. I go after those like it's my job. I dig down until I find the end and totally eradicate them. Why don't I do the same in the garden of my soul? So I started the process. I began by identifying my root sin. I used two books to help me:



Next I began to study the opposing virtues for my root sin. Both books gave practical advice on actions to take to stop committing the same sin; what to do when the urge strikes you to make the same mistake; what to do if you are not successful this time; and actions to take to grow in the opposing virtue. So I studied, made notes, and went to confession. I focused my Lenten observances around rooting this sin out of the garden of my soul. I am writing this on Ash Wednesday so I cannot give you a progress report yet. However, this morning I listen to the *Abiding Together Podcast*. It was part 2 of an interview with Fr. Josh Johnson entitled *An Invitation to God's Mercy*. Fr. Josh is discussing his new book coauthored with Fr. Mike Schmitz, *Pocket Guide to the Sacrament of Confession*. In the interview, Fr. Josh shared a story that changed how he personally encountered confession. A priest, Fr. Mark Toups, asked Fr. Josh, at the time a seminarian, a question:

What happened before you sinned? What were you longing for?

Fr. Josh describes the effect of the question. This made him stop and look at his day, examine his heart, and explore what happened that day. Did he have a conversation with someone where he perceived rejection, causing him to grasp for a quick fix of sin? Maybe before gossiping there is a sense of wanting to belong? Perhaps there are abandonment issues that have never been addressed, so we participate in gossip because we do not want to be left out? What preceded the sin in the interior of the heart? Where am I longing for intimacy with God? Sometimes there is something in the deep level of the heart that causes us to do what we do. Sometimes there are triggers- natural things in our psyche that are going to precede the repetition of bad habits. During the interview, Michelle Benzinger reminds us that St. Teresa of Avila says that self-awareness is the beginning of holiness. We need to be students of ourselves.

In the Act of Contrition we say, “I will avoid the near occasion of sin.” I know what my bad habit is, but what precedes it? What is the near occasion for me? These are the questions I will be pondering in my heart Lent 2021.

“Behind every disordered desire, is a good and holy desire, an unmet need, a wound and an unconfessed pattern of sin.”

Dr. Bob Schuchts

“It's a matter of sin management versus allowing Jesus, the gardener, to come to the root of our tree...till the soil, that's the real work.”

Sister Miriam