
"Bad Thoughts".

Some students stated on their questionnaire that "bad thoughts" are their difficulty, and that they cannot distinguish between mortal and venial sins regarding them.

First of all, it is well to hold on to this fact: there is no mortal sin unless we knowingly and deliberately welcome and leave the bad thought in our mind after our conscience has warned us of its presence.

A bad thought, for example, may have been in our mind for a second, a half a minute, a minute or longer; then our conscience waves the red flag -- the danger signal. If we immediately take steps to try to banish the thought there is no sin. If we try to banish it with half-hearted effort only there is venial sin, and we're skating on thin ice. When is it mortal? Only when we leave that thought deliberately in our mind after the warning from our conscience; only when we go on a sit-down strike, as it were, and fully welcome and enjoy that thought. Then it is a mortal sin.

We've chosen sin; we've told God to get out.

A youth must know that bad thoughts are not unusual at all, and that if he takes immediate efforts to repel them, then they are at the most temptations. By banishing them he shows himself a man, the captain of his soul. Far from being sins, those temptations are sources of merit for him, and living, actual proofs of his love of Christ. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

"Scram".

If a bad thought assails you, merely willing it not to exist does not get rid of it. Sometimes fighting directly against it, just trying to push it out, may cause it to "dig in" all the more -- cause it to sink its claws in deeper. Then we get the "jitters". We may even get discouraged and give up.

Don't try to push it out directly. Don't grapple with it. Side-step it instead. Switch the mind to something else. Fortunately, our mind can attend to only one thing at a time.

Have some interesting subject on tap that you can switch your mind to immediately, or some incident of your life, tragic or amusing, maybe, or of sports; some ambition for the future -- something that you know will hold your attention.

A short prayer will help -- "Jesus, Mary and Joseph", "Jesus," or "Mary, help me", or a Hail Mary. A thought that we are always within the vision of Christ, a thought of Our Lady at the Grotto or on the Dome -- these are prayers in themselves.

On his questionnaire, one student gave an infallible attention-arrester. Answering the question about what was his best aid in conquering temptations besides the Mass and the Sacraments, he answered:

"I distract my mind by thinking how many days it is before vacation."

Is there any student who can't turn to that easily, joyously? Rather, what student can turn away from it?

Another method is to stir yourself pronto. Move. Snap out of moodiness and day-dreaming. Here is another student's answer to the same question:

"I scream." -- and so does temptation. Try it and see!

PRAYERS: Father of Prof. Fagan. Ill: Paul J. Fry, '27; Thomas Hern, '15. Friend of Tony Rinella (Dil); John Drescher, former Carnegie Tech football captain, serious.