



A current look at one of the most forgotten—and most dangerous—sins of the soul

Introduction: What's so wrong with feeling unmotivated?

We live in an age of exhaustion. The fast pace of modern life, hyperconnectivity, information overload, and the pressure to always be productive have caused many to experience a deep soul-weariness. Sometimes we call it “boredom”, other times “lack of motivation”, “burnout”, or simply “apathy”. But beneath these modern symptoms hides an old acquaintance from Christian tradition: **acedia**.

This ancient spiritual malady, once feared by desert monks and considered one of the *capital sins*, has been forgotten by many contemporary Christians. Yet it is more alive than ever and silently stalks even the most devout soul. For this reason, more than ever, we need to rediscover what acedia is, why the Church firmly condemned it, and how we can fight it in our daily lives.

1. What is Acedia? A Forgotten-Named Sin

The word **acedia** comes from the Greek *akēdía* (ἀκηδία), meaning “negligence”, “lack of care”, “indifference”, or “disinterest”. In early Christian tradition, especially among the Desert Fathers like Evagrius Ponticus and later John Cassian, acedia was one of the eight “evil thoughts” that the monks fought against. Saint Thomas Aquinas, following this tradition, included it among the **capital sins**—those root sins from which many others grow.

But acedia is not simply physical laziness. It is not about being tired or needing rest. It is a much deeper and graver form of **spiritual sloth**, a kind of soul-weariness that loses all taste for the things of God and flees from the demands of love.

“Acedia is a sorrow about spiritual good, a repugnance toward the divine good because it is arduous and demanding.”

— St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II-II, q.35



It is that feeling of weariness, of emptiness, of “nothing makes sense” that paralyzes the interior life. It is a deep sadness in the face of spiritual good, a disgust for prayer, for love, for perseverance in what is good. It is the heart’s affliction that has lost its fervor.

2. History: From the Desert to the Modern World

The first to study acedia in detail were the **Desert Fathers**, especially in Egypt during the 4th and 5th centuries. Evagrius Ponticus described acedia as the “noonday demon”, the one that attacked the monk when the sun was high and the day seemed endless. The monk afflicted by acedia would constantly check the sundial, step out of his cell, and lose interest in prayer, manual labor, and community life.

John Cassian portrayed it as a “languor of the soul”, an inner tedium that leads the soul to despise even its spiritual commitments. Later, Pope St. Gregory the Great included it in the list of capital sins, merging it with sloth (*pigritia*), though he retained its spiritual nuance.

In the **Middle Ages**, St. Thomas Aquinas defined it as “sorrow in the face of spiritual good”, and described it as sinful because it rejects the charity that unites the soul to God. In other words, it’s a kind of slow suicide of the soul.

Today, even though the term may have disappeared from common vocabulary, its effects are ever-present—perhaps more than ever.

3. Theological Relevance: Why Is Acedia So Dangerous?

Acedia is not just “skipping prayer” or “not feeling like going to Mass.” Its gravity lies in the fact that it **directly affects the virtue of charity**, that is, God’s love in us.

What does this mean?

- That acedia is, even if passively, a rejection of God’s love.
- That it’s a spiritual poison that makes us lose the sense of eternal life.
- That it renders us lukewarm, skeptical, resigned, and incapable of joyful self-gift.



"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot... So, because you are lukewarm... I will spit you out of my mouth."
— Revelation 3:15-16

It is the sin of a soul that settles for mediocrity, that expects nothing, that has stopped fighting the good fight. It's the evil that disguises itself as emotional fatigue, rationalization, or indifference—but at its core, it's a silent rebellion against God.

4. How Does Acedia Manifest Today?

Even if we no longer use the word, **acedia is everywhere**:

- In the Catholic who attends Mass out of routine, but whose heart is cold.
- In the one who stops praying because they "feel nothing".
- In the young person who constantly seeks entertainment because they fear silence.
- In the professional who has lost a sense of purpose and lives on autopilot.
- In the parents who have lost the enthusiasm to raise their children in the faith.
- In the priest or religious tempted by disillusionment and comfort.

It also manifests as:

- **Empty activism**: filling our lives with noise to avoid facing inner emptiness.
 - **Paralyzing perfectionism**: "if I can't do it perfectly, I do nothing."
 - **Hedonism**: seeking pleasure as an escape from spiritual dullness.
 - **Despair disguised as maturity**: "I no longer expect anything new from God."
-

5. A Practical and Pastoral Guide: How to Fight Acedia Today

A. Recognize It Without Fear

Acedia often hides itself. The first battle is to **name it**, bring it to light. If you feel spiritual apathy, don't excuse it. Prostrate yourself before God with humility and acknowledge your



interior poverty. Truth is always the first step toward freedom.

| *"The truth will set you free."*
— John 8:32

B. Recover the Sense of Spiritual Combat

The Christian soul is called to the **militia Christi** (2 Tim 2:3). We are in a battle. You are not alone: God fights with you. Acedia makes us believe the fight is no longer worth it. Don't believe it. Pray even if you don't feel like it. Love even when it's hard. Persevere. Nothing defeats acedia more than fidelity in small things.

C. Return to Silence and Prayer

Acedia flees silence because it fears encountering the void within. But only there does God act. Rediscover the power of simple, constant prayer. Don't seek to feel—seek to love. Pray the Psalms. Repeat short prayers. Return to the Holy Rosary. Abandon yourself to God like a child in its mother's arms.

D. Receive the Sacraments

- **Confession:** cleanses the soul of the poison that paralyzes it.
- **Eucharist:** strength to keep going.
- **Spiritual direction:** guidance so you don't walk alone.

E. Rediscover the Beauty of Spiritual Things

Acedia darkens the soul and robs it of wonder. Read the lives of the saints. Listen to sacred music. Contemplate the Cross. Talk with other believers. Do small acts of love. The beauty of goodness defeats the dullness of evil.

F. Establish a Constant Spiritual Discipline

Don't wait to "feel like it." Saints didn't act on feelings but on love. Establish a routine: prayer, spiritual reading, daily examination of conscience. A soul without order is more vulnerable to acedia.



6. Acedia and Hope: Is There a Way Out?

The good news is that **acedia is not the end**. It is a dark night of the soul that can give way to a new dawn. God never abandons the one who fights, even when they stumble.

St. Benedict, in his Rule, recommends fighting acedia with **manual labor, spiritual reading, and persevering prayer**. St. Teresa of Ávila, who also battled this malady, spoke of “determined determination”: never abandoning prayer, no matter what it costs.

Christ Himself, in Gethsemane, overcame the temptation of spiritual sadness by embracing the Father’s will. In Him lies our strength.

Conclusion: Why Talk About Acedia Today?

Because we are surrounded by sad, anesthetized, spiritually asleep people. Because many hearts live without hope, without direction, without a taste for God. Because the modern soul has lost the language of the soul and needs to recover the fire of living faith.

Acedia is not cured with more stimuli, but with more depth. We need to rediscover the beauty of silence, of sacrifice, of constant prayer, of a life offered in love.

Acedia is real, but **grace is even more real**. The Holy Spirit can rekindle the fire we’ve lost.

“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”
— Romans 12:11

For meditation and sharing:

- Do you recognize signs of acedia in your life?
- When was the last time you prayed even when you didn’t feel like it?



- What small spiritual habits could you reclaim today?
-

If this article touched something in your heart, don't ignore it. Acedia is fought with humility, prayer, and constancy. **You are not alone!** Christ walks with you, even when you don't feel Him.

Rise and pray. Even if you don't feel like it. That's where resurrection begins.