



Introduction: The subtle art of avoiding what matters

It's Saturday morning. You have to write that report, prepare a talk for the parish group, study for a theology exam, or simply pray. But first, you decide that your desk needs tidying. And while you're at it, you might as well thoroughly clean the keyboard with cotton swabs and alcohol. Then you organize your computer files, check emails, update the calendar, watch some “productive” content on YouTube... and the day is gone.

You feel busy, even virtuous. But deep down, you know you haven't done what truly matters.

This phenomenon has a name: **modern laziness disguised as usefulness**. Or, as spiritual tradition has called it for centuries, **acedia**, a form of inner apathy that pushes us to flee from deep duty, from God's call to what truly transforms our soul.

I. Sloth: a misunderstood vice

When we think of sloth, we imagine someone lying on a couch doing absolutely nothing. But that's a superficial view. The real face of sloth is much more elusive and dangerous.

What is sloth?

In **moral theology**, sloth is a resistance or spiritual repugnance to the good we are called to do. St. Thomas Aquinas defines it as **“tristitia de bono divino”** (sadness about the divine good). It's not simply doing nothing—it's **rejecting or postponing** what truly matters: inner growth, fulfilling our Christian duties, responding to God's love.

Acedia: ancient root of a modern evil

Acedia, a word used by the Desert Fathers to name this deep form of sloth, is a mix of tedium, distraction, avoidance, and indifference. The monk Evagrius Ponticus called it “the noonday demon”: the temptation to leave the cell, look out the window, find excuses not to pray or work on the essential. In the 21st century, we may not live in the desert, but we are just as distracted.



II. “Productive” procrastination: sloth disguised as efficiency

In the digital age, laziness no longer manifests as inaction, but as **misdirected hyperactivity**. We do many things—but we avoid the ones we should truly be doing. And we justify it with logic that seems unimpeachable: “I’m being productive.” But **productivity is not always obedience to the will of God**.

Everyday examples

- A seminarian who spends hours organizing his notes but doesn’t pray the Divine Office.
- A mother who obsessively cleans the house instead of sitting down to talk with her teenage son.
- A priest who fills his schedule with meetings but avoids the silence of Adoration.
- A layperson who consumes spiritual content on social media but never actually prays.

It’s the cleaned keyboard—but the prayer undone.

The tidy desk—but the letter of reconciliation unwritten.

The “I did a thousand things”—but not what God asked of you today.

III. Biblical foundation: God calls us to the center, not the periphery

Scripture is clear: **God doesn’t just want activity; He wants fidelity to His purpose**. The Lord does not reward the busy servants, but those who do His will.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

(Matthew 7:21)

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one.”



| (Luke 10:41-42)

Martha wasn't idle. She was busy—even with good tasks. But she wasn't centered on what mattered. Her sister Mary, sitting at the feet of the Master, had chosen “the better part.”

IV. Theological and pastoral relevance: the battle against soul-avoidance

An inner battle

Spiritual sloth is **one of the seven capital sins** because it undermines the interior life. It's not just laziness: it's a **resistance to growth, to love, to self-giving**. It's a flight from the daily cross, from commitment to God and neighbor.

Common causes

- Lack of deep understanding of Christian duty.
 - Fear of confronting inner emptiness.
 - Paralyzing perfectionism: “If I can't do it perfectly, better not do it at all.”
 - Overvaluing secondary tasks.
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V. A practical guide to combating spiritual sloth

1. Discern what's essential

Ask yourself each morning:

What does God expect of me today that, if I don't do it, everything else will be secondary?

Make a task list and **underline in red what's essential**. If you don't, you'll end up cleaning the keyboard but not praying.

2. Break the cycle with decisiveness

Procrastination is like a whirlpool: the more you feed it, the stronger it becomes. To get out, you need a concrete and immediate action. Start by **doing at least five minutes of what**



you’re avoiding. The Holy Spirit acts in movement.

3. Overcome with humble mortification

Not in the mood? Even better! Offer that struggle as an inner mortification. Sloth is defeated **through small, constant sacrifices**, like getting up without hitting snooze, or praying when the soul feels dry.

4. Establish sacred rituals

Create daily non-negotiable habits such as:

- Starting the day with a Bible verse and prayer.
- Having a set time for personal prayer.
- Reserving weekly time for deep silence.

Consistency defeats the noonday demon.

5. Seek spiritual accompaniment

A spiritual director can help identify **energy and willpower leaks**, and correct that false activity that hides evasion. Another’s perspective exposes what we struggle to see.

6. Review the day with sincerity

Each night, ask yourself:

- Did I do what I should, or just what was easiest?
- What part of my day was a disguised escape?
- Where was I truly united to the Lord?

The examen of conscience is the sword against sloth.

VI. Living with an eternal perspective

God doesn’t ask us to “do many things,” but to **do His will with love**. Modern sloth—the one disguised as perfectionism, productivity, or apparent commitment—is a silent enemy that robs us of our interior life.



Sloth (Apathy): The “Productive” Procrastination. When You Clean the Keyboard to Avoid What Really Matters | 5

St. Paul exhorts us:

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”
(Ephesians 5:14)

Today, that light might begin by simply not cleaning the keyboard... and sitting down to pray.

Conclusion: Do what matters most first

The Christian life isn't about “doing a lot,” but about loving God **with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength**. That means saying **no** to the temptation of the inconsequential—even when it comes dressed as efficiency.

Did you clean the keyboard? Good. But don't forget that there's a soul waiting to be purified, a heart waiting to be converted, a God waiting to meet you.

May it not be too late to stop running from what matters.
Do what matters. Today.