Seven Deadly Sins: 1. Gluttony

Some very kind people gave us some biscuits for Christmas; others gave us some *Quality Street*. Thank you – you know who you are! Sue and I are sharing the *Quality Street* and I have just eaten two of them. How many can I eat without committing the sin of gluttony? It’s a natural question to ask. We always want to put boundaries in place so we can tell when a line has been crossed. But sin generally evades such clear definitions.

The tendency to be driven by appetite rather than by reason is called the sin of concupiscence by those theologians who have a marked preference for using obscure vocabulary. Thomas Aquinas said that ‘Gluttony denotes inordinate concupiscence in eating.’ In other words, it is not so much a question of how many chocolates I eat; more a question of how much I want to eat them. It is the *desire* involved in gluttony which makes it a deadly sin, because it is the sinful desire which leads to the sinful behaviour. According to Christianity.com, Aquinas distinguished five different ways of eating which entail the sin of gluttony. Gluttony drives us to:

eat food that is too luxurious, exotic, or costly: *laute;*

eat food that is excessive in quality (too daintily or elaborately prepared): *studiose;*

eat food that is excessive in quantity (too much): *nimis;*

eat hastily (too soon or at an inappropriate time): *praepropere;*

eat greedily (too eagerly): *ardenter.*

Do you find Aquinas’ distinctions helpful? Does it matter what we eat and how we eat it? If so, why? Why can’t we just enjoy our food without being made to feel guilty about it? How can we honour God in our diet? How can what Paul says in Romans 14:6; 1 Timothy 4:1-4 help us to enjoy good food with a clear conscience?

Aquinas would say that fasting holds the key to overcoming the sin of gluttony. Would you agree? Should we fast as Christians? If so, when and why? Are there good and valid reasons for not fasting?

The government estimates that in 2021 to 2022, 63.8% of adults aged 18 years and over in England were estimated to be overweight or living with obesity. One reason for this is that the environment we live in makes it difficult for many people to eat healthily and do enough physical activity, and so extra calories, particularly those from foods high in fat and sugar, are stored in the body as fat. Genetic factors, health conditions, stress and medical side-effects can also make a difference, so we cannot directly connect obesity to gluttony in our society. However, fast foods, such as bakery products, burgers, caffeinated and sugar-sweetened drinks, chips, chocolates, noodles and pizza all contain relatively high levels of sugar, caffeine salt and fat, and these are far more addictive than nourishing. Only good food is good for you. So, what does a healthy diet look like? Do you agree that our culture makes it harder for people to live healthy lives? Is that any excuse for our behaviour?

In Ezekiel 16:49, God accuses his people of being guilty of the same sins as the city of Sodom. Might he say the same about our society? If so, how should we respond?

Proverbs 23:19-21 warns against keeping company with the glutton and the drunkard. Yet Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34). How would you have responded had you been there? Would you have been partying with Jesus, or might you have disapproved of the places he went and the company he kept? When it comes to lifestyle choices, is it OK for some of us to live in certain ways that would not be good for other people? If we go out clubbing or go to parties, how do we know what is good and right for us – and how hard or easy do we find it to stick to our principles?

Is gluttony something which should be on the church’s agenda? How would you respond to someone who said that these concerns are a distraction from our primary task, which is preaching the gospel and saving souls from a lost eternity?

‘Lord, protect me from spiritual gluttony. Protect me from consuming more than I need and of failing to concern myself with enabling others to have what they need. Protect me from spiritual selfishness—the temptation to consume rather than contribute, to be served rather than to serve, to be blessed rather than to be a blessing to others,’ (renew.org).