



Acedia

Listlessness

God found him in a desert land, and in the howling desert of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. *Deuteronomy 32:10*



Elijah in the wilderness, Eric Bouts

Reading material

The Cloister walk, Kathleen Norris, *Acedia* or for a fuller text see Norris's *The Noonday Demon*

In Blackwater woods, Mary Oliver poem

The Philokalia, volume 1, *On listlessness* by Palmer, Sherrard and Ware

Questions

- Can I allow myself to love and enjoy (my) life?
- Have I pre-conditions for my experience of joy?
- Are grace and love indeed stronger than despair and dejection?

If acedia has been your experience what has helped? For Norris it's been spiritual direction and walking or praying the psalms, making bread and accepting family responsibilities.

Soul weariness

In our reading Kathleen Norris introduces the old and almost forgotten word 'acedia' or listlessness.

Norris expands. 'I recognize...the siege of what the desert monks termed the 'noonday demon'. It suggests that whatever I'm doing, indeed my entire life of 'doings', is not only meaningless but utterly useless. This plunge into the chill waters of pure realism is incapacitating, and the demon likes me this way...It mocks the rituals, routines, and work that normally fill my day; why do them, why do anything at all, it says, in the face of so vast an emptiness.'

Things that used to matter to me no longer do. The 'contradictions and dissonances by which I survive' are becoming more and more apparent. 'Indifference is more appealing.'

Norris is at pains to say how important it is to stress that the spiritual experience (acedia) and the medical condition (depression) are different. Therapy for the latter, and the traditional monastic 'rules' of community, stability and prayer for the former.

On feeling soured on life

What are we to drink?

Reflect on the Exodus 15:22-27 narrative.

In Latin "there is a family of words related to acedia, such as acer (sharp, bitter), acetum (vinegar), and acerbum (harsh), which, taken figuratively, [make] us think that persons suffering from acedia have received a high dose of acidity", and thus are incapable of appreciating the sweetness of life. Just as spoiled wine becomes acid, he writes, "so the joy of [love], when it sours, becomes acedia. "

Dom Bernardo Olivera's *'Acedia: the sadness corroding our desire for God'*

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