

REIMAGINING  
THE SEVEN  
DEADLY SINS

RESHAPING OUR HEARTS  
IN A COMPLEX WORLD

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# INTRODUCTION

**T**he idea for this book began with an apple. Not the metaphorical kind we sometimes imagine in the story of Adam and Eve. A real apple, one that I was about to eat as part of my lunch as I sat at my desk between classes. I had just finished teaching a lesson in social justice, which, combined with a few minutes of quiet, probably gave rise to the following reflections.

As I looked at the apple, I thought about all of the people who stood between me and the orchard whence the apple came. Likely that orchard was in Washington State, where the vast majority of apples in the United States originate. There were the grower who owned the orchard, the migrant workers who picked the apples, the workers who maintained the orchard and prepared the fruit for shipping. A bit further on down the chain are those who pack the trucks that deliver the apples to market at the various distribution centers, the drivers themselves, and, nearer to me, the owner of the supermarket here in the east-

ern suburbs of New York City and those who stock the shelves and handle the cash registers where I bought the apple on my weekly shopping trip. That's a great many people working very hard—and sometimes under deplorable conditions—so that I could have my lunch.

Upon further reflection, it occurred to me that when Jesus said, “love your neighbor as you love yourself,” the neighborhood wasn't nearly as large and complex as it is today. The world that Jesus in his human nature knew was one in which most people made their living as subsistence farmers, closely tied to the land and to one another. Which is not to say that people always treated each other well, but the steps between the grower and the consumer were far fewer, if they even existed at all. Increasingly as our lives in our modern post-industrial society grow ever busier and we become more and more interconnected with people we will never meet, two questions become more and more imperative and demand answers: How do we show the love of Christ in meaningful ways not only to those in our immediate—and relatively tiny—circle of friends, family, and acquaintances but also to those sisters and brothers whose labor we depend on but who live far outside that circle? And what is our responsibility to change the unjust social systems that oppress them while benefiting us?

These two questions lie at the core of Catholic social justice teaching, a body of instruction and inspiration that, in its modern form, dates back to Pope Leo XIII in the late nineteenth century. And while most Catholics have a glancing knowledge of some key points—certainly the right to life and possibly the preferential option for the poor—many of the faithful have not

yet made a fundamental shift in head and heart that is essential if Catholicism is to be a relevant and dynamic moral force in the twenty-first century and beyond. It is the recognition that while it is still important to keep one's personal house in order by following the Ten Commandments and Jesus' exhortations in the Sermon on the Mount, focusing only on our personal sins and our personal journey toward holiness will not be sufficient. If we are to truly be disciples of Christ and stand up to the massive social injustice in our world, as he did in his, we must care at least as much about the state of the world as we do the state of our individual souls. Collectively, the body of Christ must be the "thermostat" Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. calls us to be, setting the moral temperature of society, and not merely a "thermometer" that mimics within the Church the same standard of morality—and immorality—of the world.

What might such a shift in perspective look like? The purpose of this book is to offer an example, using the lens of the seven deadly sins, but focusing not so much on the ways they are manifested in individual behavior as on the way they deform with all their ugliness the underpinnings of modern society. What does the sin of greed look like, for example, when we focus not on the individual thief but on the ways in which the privileged few tilt the playing field so that the law protects their rapacious grasping for more at the expense of those simply struggling to feed, clothe, and house their families?

In part 1, the focus will be on what this fundamental shift in emphasis looks like. We begin with Jesus as a model of how to identify personal and social sin and keep them in the right balance. Chapter 2 provides a brief review of basic Catholic

teaching about conscience and proper conscience formation, especially how both pertain to and are affected by social injustice. Chapter 3 concludes this basic overview by going into more detail about the “new things” Pope Leo XIII noticed in his groundbreaking encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, and why Pope Leo’s letter challenged the fundamental approach to moral theology in the Church.

Part 2 of the book focuses on the seven deadly sins directly, beginning with a brief review of what these sins are and why they are so particularly deadly. After that we take a closer look at each of the sins and apply them to particular social injustices of our day. In chapter 5, we’ll look at how the sins of pride (arrogance) and lust provide the poisonous soil for the two fundamental sins of American society—racism and sexism. Chapter 6 looks at the connection between greed, gluttony, and sloth and the gaping global economic inequalities of our planet as well as their contribution to the degradation of the natural environment, in particular in relation to climate change. The final chapter of the book focuses on how wrath and envy cause the epidemic of gun violence in America as well as the demonization of the immigrant.

Just when things seem darkest, the book’s conclusion offers a few reasons why we should not be afraid to venture out into the farthest regions of this enormous global neighborhood. Why, in fact, divine grace may have led us to this particular crossroads at this particular time. It seems we are faced on all sides with an inescapable and stark choice. To slightly paraphrase Pope Francis, that choice is whether to build bridges of understanding and compassion or walls of hate and fear.

Along the way, at the end of every chapter, the building materials for those magnificent bridges are supplied in the form of readings from both Scripture and literature, inviting the reader to think deeply and prayerfully about the possibilities. And if we are willing to be people of prayer and people of courage, standing in solidarity in Christ, within whom “we live and move and have our being” as St. Paul wrote, then we will not only beat our swords into plowshares but also level our walls and turn them into bridges.



**PART I**

RECOGNIZING  
SOCIAL SIN



## CHAPTER 1

# “WHERE’S THE GUY?”

*Adopting the perspective of Jesus*

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”...When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” » JOHN 8:1-11

Jesus' actions in the story of the woman caught in adultery would have made Sherlock Holmes proud. The famous detective created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle solved more than one case that seemed impossible to crack by simply noticing the obvious. In the story of the woman, Jesus too notices the obvious. If a woman is being dragged by herself through the streets into the public square on the grounds of adultery, the obvious question is: "Where's the guy?"

The answer, unfortunately from a modern perspective, is also obvious. In the Mosaic Law that Jesus and all of those in the story followed, the penalty of death by stoning in the case of adultery applied only to the woman caught in the act of adultery. Why? Because according to the patriarchal culture of the day, women were a special class of property belonging to men. The Bible is full of examples of this prejudice; here's one: In their original wording, the ninth and tenth commandments prohibit coveting "thy neighbor's goods" and "thy neighbor's wife." Our modern sensibility encourages us to substitute "spouse," and while that makes sense morally, it changes the original meaning. A man's wife, in biblical times, belonged to him every bit as much as did his material possessions, his children, and his farm animals.

Jesus recognizes this societal assumption as did every other man in that crowd. The difference between Jesus and the elders is that Jesus sees it for the social sin that it is. The others see it as "God's will"—though to say that they would have not on some level recognized it as a convenient way to protect the status of the ruling elites (all of whom were men) would be naive. And so when Jesus says, "Let he who has not sinned cast the first stone," he is not so much speaking of their personal sins; he is speaking

of the social injustice in which they are all participating—the dehumanization of women.

**PERSONAL SIN VS. SOCIAL SIN**

Of course, Jesus recognizes personal sins such as adultery as real dangers. This is why he instructs the woman to “go and sin no more.” Jesus knows that all personal sins are against God’s will, not because God is a control freak who will not brook disobedience among his children, but because God’s will for each of us is that we live lives of joy, and joyful lives are chock full of deep and meaningful relationships. As demonstrated in Genesis chapters 3–11, personal sins act like a sharp knife slashing through the sacred relationships of our lives, causing disharmony between the sinner, the community, nature, and God.

For all the damage personal sin does, however, it pales in comparison to the devastation wrought by social sin. Social sin occurs when a society operates through structures that are oppressive and that undermine human dignity. Social injustice is the effect of social sin. Precisely because they deviate from the norm of what we consider moral behavior, personal sins (at least in the case of sins of commission) can be identified, the sinner can be helped to see the error of their ways, and, if by God’s grace there is a genuine desire on the part of the sinner to repent, they can make the necessary changes to behavior and attitude and receive the forgiveness God is eager to supply. Thus the reason the Church considers reconciliation a sacrament.

Social sins, on the other hand, are much more insidious. When the structures of a society are bent away from the “arc of justice,” a phrase used often by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,

sin becomes so much a part of our moral environment that we almost stop noticing it. A vicious cycle is set up as the injustices of the society in which we live become a breeding ground for more and more personal sin, which leads to even more injustice. As we will explore in the next chapter, conscience becomes ever more deformed as we gradually lose contact with the moral compass within that seeks to guide us.

There is a reason that the Hebrew prophets were persecuted, rejected, and often killed. There is a reason our modern prophets who speak against the social sins of today suffer such violent rejection. Nelson Mandela, for example, spent twenty-five years in jail for peacefully but persistently opposing apartheid in South Africa. Like the elders in the story of the woman caught in adultery, we lose our sense of real sin, swallowing the camel of our complicity with social injustice while we strain out the gnat of the personal sins of others—but hardly ever our own.

**“SEE, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”**

The time has come for a paradigm shift. As Pope Leo XIII prophetically pointed out at the end of the nineteenth century, society’s increasing complexity since the time of Jesus calls for a drastic reevaluation of how we understand the Commandments and Beatitudes. (We will explore Pope Leo’s XIII groundbreaking encyclical, and its implications, in chapter 3.) The “neighborhood” in which we are called to love one another is so much larger, and the vast bulk of it is made up of people we will never meet in person but who will be tremendously affected by the decisions we make in all areas of our lives. (Just take a moment to consider what you had for breakfast this morning or the

clothes you are wearing as you read this. How many people were involved in bringing those products to you, beginning with those who grew and harvested the raw materials or who tended the animals?) While the Ten Commandments remain as relevant as ever, Catholic moral teaching increasingly emphasizes our responsibility to reform not just ourselves but our society. In fact, it is simply impossible to do one without the other.

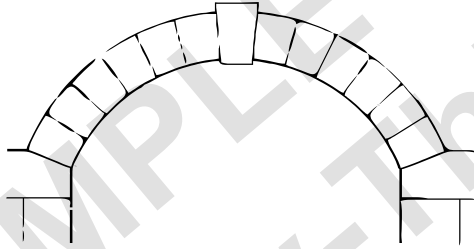
This shift in emphasis takes the form of seven basic themes or principles that, woven together, frame the social justice teaching of the Church. According to the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops ([usccb.org](http://usccb.org)), they are:

- 1) ***The life and dignity of the human person***—Sometimes referred to as the “seamless garment of life,” this keystone tenet holds that life is sacred from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.
- 2) ***The right to full participation in society***—Human beings by nature are both sacred and social. Every human being must be able to fully access all that is necessary to live a fully human life. These things include food, clothing, and shelter but also less tangible things, such as education and health care.
- 3) ***Rights and responsibilities***—As proclaimed in the foundational documents of our country, human beings have certain inalienable rights (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness) but also corresponding responsibilities to participate in and build a just society.

- 4) ***The preferential option for the poor***—We must always consider the needs of the poor first in making decisions and allocating resources, which requires us to focus more on the common good than our personal interests.
- 5) ***The rights and dignity of workers***—this includes things such as a right to a job for all willing to work, a right to a decent wage, a right to safe and decent working conditions, and a right to join a union.
- 6) ***Solidarity***—A recognition that when Jesus says all are sisters and brothers, he is speaking not metaphorically but literally. As mountain climbers ascending a steep slope tie themselves with rope to one another so that if one slips the rest can support them, we are truly all in this together.
- 7) ***Care and concern for the environment***—This a principle particularly close to Pope Francis' heart; rather than emphasizing only stewardship—the recognition that human beings are responsible for taking care of the earth for future generations—this principle calls us to recognize our fundamental connection within the web of life of our planet. What we do to mother Earth, we do to ourselves.

### **THE SOCIAL JUSTICE ARCH**

I like to think of these seven principles as a kind of "Social Arch," which I imagine to look something like this:



An arch is a support structure; in this case our arch supports a just society. Imagine the keystone, which locks in the other stones, as the dignity of human life; without this recognition no other tenet can stand. Yet to focus only on this principle at the expense of all of the others leaves us with no arch at all. Either all of the principles are observed, or none of them are.

### **THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS**

Centuries ago, the moral teachers of the Church developed a means to simplify many of the requirements of personal morality and discipleship through a prism known as the seven deadly sins. It is no coincidence that both the social justice themes and this list total seven; seven is the number of perfection or completion in the Bible. Follow the seven social justice principles and we are on the way to creating a perfectly just society fully

realized in the kingdom of God; indulge in the seven deadly sins and we are on the way to the perfect corruption and radical isolation known as hell.

This is an easy-to-understand means of gaining insight into a fundamental darkness in the human heart that causes us to turn away from joy, refuse God's grace and love, and misuse our free will. A common thread that ties together all seven sins is that each involves an excessive attachment to something that, in and of itself, is good. For example, self-love is a good thing when it is rooted in a recognition that each of us has been created in the image and likeness of God. When we become so attached to our own selfish interests that we ignore the needs of others, however, healthy love of self has been distorted into the sin of pride or arrogance.

The shift toward a greater awareness of social sin has brought to light a fundamental flaw in the traditional way we understand the seven deadly sins. To think of the seven as primarily personal sins suggests that a personal sin is at the root of all of society's evils (not completely untrue, but too simplistic) or that individual salvation is all that matters (I keep my soul clean, and you do as you will). We forget that at the heart of biblical morality is God's desire to save a community, not just a few fortunate individuals. Too many Christians carry around a dangerously flawed perception of salvation that seems to suggest the world around us is a shark-filled ocean and the only safe place to be is on the ark of the Church that floats among the predators. The truth according to Jesus—who instructs his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations”—is closer to the opposite. It is precisely within those shark-infested waters that grace is at work. And if we wish to be



caught up in this enterprise of grace, best to jump in and swim with our fellow sinners, having faith that the Spirit will work a transformation in those waters through us. It is what Paul talks about when he calls us to be "in the world, but not of the world."

I invite you, in imitation of Jesus, to look at the obvious as it pertains to the society in which we live and the way its most vulnerable members are treated. Let us together reimagine the seven deadly sins so that we can see not only the excessive attachments of our personal lives but those of the society in which we live and in which we participate and, perhaps most important, the nexus between the two. This journey requires a great deal of love, courage, faith, and hope. It's a journey that will at times be difficult because it will challenge our perception of what it means to be a "good" person. As with all enterprises of the Spirit, however, we will inevitably see a wider horizon of possibilities.

We are all spiritual mountain climbers, joined together with the bonds of the Spirit, called by God ever upward on our pilgrimage. Either all of us make it, or none of us do.



### *For reflection and discussion*

Read once again the Scripture passage at the beginning of this chapter. Then, read the following passage from the conclusion of *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

But there was a more real life for Hester Prynne here, in New England, than in that unknown region where

Pearl had found a home. Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence. She had returned, therefore, and resumed,—of her own free will, for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have imposed it,—resumed the symbol of which we have related so dark a tale. Never afterwards did it quit her bosom. But...the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, and yet with reverence, too.

1. What are some parallels you see between the plight of the woman caught in adultery and the plight of Hester Prynne? What do you imagine Jesus would have had to say to Hester?
2. After reading the conclusion of *The Scarlet Letter*, imagine a conclusion for the story of the woman caught in adultery. How would she have been changed by this encounter with Jesus? What would her relationship be with those in the town who had condemned her?
3. How would you describe the encounter with grace experienced by the woman who is forgiven by Jesus?
4. In what ways were the two women ostracized from their communities. Does it seem fair? Why or why not?



**PART II**

REIMAGINING  
THE SEVEN  
DEADLY SINS

## CHAPTER 4

# THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

### *An Overview*

Concupiscence. Webster's dictionary defines it as a "strong desire," especially in connection with sexual desires. Catholic moral teaching understands it as the human tendency toward sin, a desire to "worship the created instead of the creator." It is the lingering effect of original sin in human life. Original sin is the desperate human attempt to fill the yawning emptiness within—a response to, as Fr. Thomas Keating wrote, "the illusion that we are alone and unloved in an indifferent universe"—by demanding more from created goods than they can supply. The seven deadly sins provide a more comprehensive means to understand the nature of concupiscence. Each one of the sins—pride, greed, lust, wrath, envy, gluttony, and sloth—identify a fundamental pull away from God within the human heart.

**GNOSTICISM**

At first glance it might appear that the seven deadly sins, in fact the whole Christian understanding of concupiscence, is an insidious attempt on the part of religious folk to drive a wedge between the spirit and the body. Many hold the mistaken idea that one must choose between happiness in this life and misery in the next, or misery in this life and happiness in the next. Isn't that what St. Paul means, after all, when he makes a distinction between those born of flesh and those born of the spirit? (See Galatians 5:16–25 for an example.)

Such a concept directly contradicts the core Christian belief in the Incarnation. Our belief that the Son, second person of the Holy Trinity, took on human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth signifies among other things the fundamental union of matter and spirit. The complete, eternal, and uncompromised union of Jesus' divine and human natures—known as the hypostatic union in Christian theology—was developed in great detail in the early Church in response to Gnosticism, one of the earliest Christian heresies. Rooted in the sharp distinction between body and soul that was a central part of ancient Greek philosophy, Gnosticism encompassed a collection of beliefs that either denied Jesus' human nature or understood that it had been totally absorbed by his divine nature. The dogma of the Incarnation, on the other hand, proclaims that flesh, and all of creation, is fundamentally holy and good.

**THE COMMON DENOMINATOR**

What, then, makes the seven deadly sins so deadly? Keep in mind the essence of original sin as worshipping the created rather

than the Creator. Each of the deadly sins involves an excessive attachment to something in creation that is good in itself. It is the misuse of the created good that leads to sin. Take, for example, the sin of pride—better understood as arrogance. To take pride in one's self, to give glory to God for the ways in which we have, in cooperation with the Spirit, developed our gifts and shared them, to recognize that each of us has been created and are sustained in love—all of this is holy and good. Jesus teaches that you cannot love your neighbor—whether next door or around the world—unless you love yourself.

But what if I forget that God loves every other daughter and son God has created as much as God loves me? What if I begin to believe in my heart—which will inevitably show through in my actions—that I am more valuable than others? That my needs are more important? What if I begin to mistake my ego—the image I have of myself—for who I truly am in God's eyes? All of these subtle shifts in perspective move us from a healthy love of self to an excessive attachment to ourselves. This radical self-centeredness is the *sin* of pride. God is no longer the center of my life; I am. Good and evil, therefore, are no longer about what pleases or displeases God. They are now about what pleases or displeases *me*.

The same distortion caused by excessive attachment to what is otherwise good can be seen in the other deadly sins as well. (Keep in mind that the sin of pride acts as an accelerant for all of the rest, because the more I substitute my will for the will of God, the easier it becomes to justify sinful action.) The first creation story demonstrates God's blessing on our sexuality when God exhorts the newly created woman and man to "be fertile

and multiply.” The Second Vatican Council recognized not only this procreative value of sexual intimacy in marriage but also a unitive value. When two people who love one another with a covenantal love have entered into a sacramental marriage and express this love physically in the sexual union, that intimacy is nurtured and made deeper. When we become so attached to the pleasurable feelings of the genital expressions of our sexuality, however, that we seek to divorce them from their proper connection to the procreative and unitive dimensions of sexual intimacy in relationship, we commit the sin of lust.

God offers abundant material blessings in the form of the natural resources of the earth so that all human beings might have what they need. There is nothing wrong with seeking to provide oneself and one’s family with the necessary share of those resources. (In Catholic social justice teaching, this is known as the universal destination of created goods.) There is something very wrong, however, when we are not satisfied with that which we need for our sustenance and begin to hoard surpluses of wealth or essential goods such as food, water, clothing, and shelter so that others lack basic necessities. When we become excessively attached to created goods and begin to seek from them a level of security or physical satiation or happiness that they are unable to supply, we are committing the sins of greed and gluttony.

The same principle holds true for the deadly sins that are less tangible. Being angry is a normal human emotion, and sometimes the appropriate emotion in the face of personal or social injustice. Jesus demonstrates this when he cleanses the temple (see John 2:13–17). All emotions are transitory and will wane.

If I feel so aggrieved, however, by the actions of another person toward me or by the unfairness of life or by God, I may become so attached to my anger that I do not want to let it go. Instead of *being* angry I start to *live* angry, and what was a healthy emotion hardens into the sin of wrath. There is nothing wrong with being ambitious and in taking inspiration from the achievements of others to motivate myself to do better and to contribute more to the world. If I become so attached to the other person's successes, however, as to denigrate the blessings in my life, or if I begin to begrudge the other person his/her achievements, then I begin to feel the effects of the sin of envy.

At the other end of the spectrum from misplaced ambition lies the sin of sloth. The good to which we become excessively attached in this case is leisure time. Recall the ending of the first creation story in which God sets aside the seventh day to celebrate and appreciate all of the good things God's will has brought into being. And if God is not so busy to take time off to celebrate and appreciate life, could we possibly be? It is essential that we take time to celebrate God's gifts and love in personal and communal prayer and worship, to relax from the daily demands of work, to enjoy and appreciate the company of family and friends, to pursue wholesome leisure time activities that renew and replenish us. We know that Jesus recognizes the importance of this because of one charge frequently leveled against him: "This man eats and drinks with sinners." May the same charge be leveled against us!

Yet we must not forget that the gifts we have been given through God's grace must be developed and shared or they will atrophy. Jesus reminds us that, to be his disciple, each of us must



pick up his/her cross each day and do the hard work that conversion and love demand so that we can build the City of God in the here and now. If I choose to disengage with the world and stick my head in the sand so that I don't have to see the injustice around me, or if I engage in leisure time activities that are not wholesome, or if I overindulge in those that are, then a pursuit of leisure becomes the sin of sloth.

### **THE NEW FRONTIER**

In offering us a meaningful way to recognize the darker impulses of our human nature, the seven deadly sins provide Catholics with a useful aid to discerning and getting to the roots of sin. As mentioned previously, however, such reflections can leave us with the false impression that keeping one's own house in order is the *only* requirement on the road to salvation. As outlined in the first part of this book, the shift that has occurred in Catholic moral teaching over the last century or so increasingly emphasizes the reality of social sin, the injustice that stems from it, and our responsibility to bring our faith into the public square and work with others to find solutions. This paradigm shift does not deny the reality of personal sin or the need for personal repentance and conversion—a close look at the excessive attachments outlined above will show that they all have social implications. It does confirm, however, that focusing solely on personal morality is not sufficient. Cooperating with grace and making use of the sacraments to confront our personal darkness makes us freer to engage in the hard work of social justice but leaves us at the threshold of holy transformation. We need to follow the example of Jesus in the

story of the woman caught in adultery. Recall that Jesus does not approve of the sin of adultery, but he does put it in perspective. The greater sin in the background of the story is the social sin involved in viewing women as property.

Matter and spirit are inextricably bound together. The kingdom of God is among us, and our communal work for social justice is inextricably bound up with the full realization of that kingdom and our participation in it. For us to be fully open to the Spirit and thus fully engaged in the hard work of building that City of God in the here and now, we must recognize that *these same excessive attachments that cause personal sin are also at the root of all of the human-made injustices in society*. As for those evils grounded in the unpredictability of life—storms, earthquakes, floods, for example—our excessive attachments at the societal level ensure that these evils will inflict the most damage on those least able to deal with them. The remaining three chapters of this book are an invitation to begin reimagining what the seven deadly sins look like when we shift from a personal to a social point of view.



### *For reflection and discussion*

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

» **MATTHEW 5:1–12**

Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person such as mutilation, torments inflicted on the body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons;

all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society, and they do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator. » **POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II,**  
*THE GOSPEL OF LIFE [EVANGELIUM VITAE], 3*

1. Contrast the qualities of the kingdom person Jesus offers in the Beatitudes with the seven deadly sins. How might the beatitude values serve as an antidote? Be as specific as you can.
2. How do you in your own life emphasize the holy impulses outlined in the Beatitudes and minimize the darker impulses that lead to the deadly sins? Where do you find yourself struggling? Where have you seen a real transformation by the power of the Spirit?
3. As a Church, which Beatitudes do we seem to be living out most faithfully? How? What impact have we had on transforming society? Which of the seven deadly sins seem to have a stranglehold on us? What must be done to foster a communal repentance and conversion?
4. When you consider the elements outlined in the excerpt from *The Gospel of Life*, referred to in other places by Pope John Paul II as forming a “culture of death,” what connections to the seven deadly sins can you make? What social transformation is needed to overcome this culture? Be as specific as you can.