

“Gluttony: Misplaced Hunger”

In the second book of the Hunger Games series, *Catching Fire*, the heroine, Katniss Everdeen, a young woman from an impoverished district in the Hunger Games universe, finds herself in the Capitol at a banquet as part of her Victor's Tour along with Peeta, a young man from her same district. In describing the banquet Katniss reflects to the reader:

“Every table presents new temptations, and even on my restricted one-taste-per-dish regimen, I begin filling up quickly. I pick up a small roasted bird, bit into it, and my tongue floods with orange sauce. Delicious. but I make Peeta eat the remainder because I want to keep tasting things, and the idea of showing away food, as I see so many people doing so casually, is abhorrent to me. After about ten tables I'm stuffed, and we've only sampled a small number of the dishes available. Just then my prep team descends on us. They're nearly incoherent between the alcohol they've consumed and their ecstasy at being at such a grand affair.

“Why aren't you eating?” asks Octavia.

“I have been but I can't hold another bite,” I say. They all laugh as if that's the silliest thing they've ever heard.

“No one lest that stop them!” says Flavia. They lead us over to a table that holds tiny stemmed wineglasses filled with clear liquid. “Drink this!”

Peeta picks one up to take a sip and they lose it.

“Not here!” shrieks Octavia.

“You have to do it in there,” says Venia, pointing to doors that lead to the toilets. “Or you'll get it all over the floor!”

Peeta looks at the glass again and puts it together. “You mean this will make me puke?”

My prep team laughs hysterically. “Of course, so you can keep eating,” says Octavia.

“I've been in there twice already. Everyone does it, or else how would have you have any fun at a feast?”

I'm speechless, staring at all the pretty little glasses and all they imply.

If food is so tasty, why on earth is gluttony a sin?

Food is so important in the biblical story. One of the earliest criticisms of Jesus and his disciples was not that his theology was bad, or that his biblical interpretation was flawed.

Rather it was of gluttony, Jesus' critics said in Luke, "The disciples of John fast often and pray frequently. The disciples of the Pharisees do the same, but your disciples are always eating and drinking." (5:33). And again in 7:34 they accuse Jesus of being "a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" In Jesus' story many of Jesus' teachings occur around the meal table. That's got to put us in good company, yes?

So I ask again, if food is so tasty, so important why is gluttony a sin?

Gluttony is sinful to the degree that some consume too much in a world where others do have not enough of the necessities of life. In gluttony, it is the excessiveness that is the sin, excessive consumption as well as excessive attentiveness to food. Although, while I may make many references to food this morning, Gluttony is frequently associated with food, gluttony can be extended to other things in life. "In one sense, gluttony is about us—our bodies, our need for more experiences, more things, more vacations, more clothing, more collectables, more stuff." Whatever the glutton's meal of choice is, it's in excess. Gluttony ultimately isn't about one's BMI, rather, it's about immoderation; trying to fill a gaunt soul with worldly pleasures.

Gluttony, like the other 7 Deadly Sins, does have some overlap with its fellow sins. Like Greed, for instance, where the focus is on hoarding, and there never being enough, Gluttony is a close cousin, however, it's concerned with consumption. Where the greedy just want the things, Gluttony wants to consume them. Gluttony's pleasure comes from the consumption. And like Lust, Gluttony, is preoccupied with pleasure, the difference being that gluttony's pleasure comes from feeding its voracious hunger. This is why, typically, Gluttony is frequently associated with food.

Gluttony is unconcerned with the plight of others. Others don't even figure into its calculus. It wants what it can get and consume and doesn't care if there's enough for the next person. And this, to me is the ugliness of Gluttony. This to me is where the Sin of Gluttony shines, Gluttony is unjust in its consumption, it's a selfish, me-first, kind of consumption.

While Jesus might have been called a glutton, he highlighted the gluttonous nature of his accusers through series of parables about parties and feasts that highlight hosts who were unconcerned with those who didn't have enough, with those who refused to live justly so that others may just live. This to me is the epitome of what Gluttony is, its excessive consumption

without the care or sense of justness in its consumption. The glutton consumes more than they need and denies the excess to others.

Gluttony like pride, seeks to do God's work for God. When the glutton feels need or emptiness, they do not want to have to depend on God or to wait on God to fill it. The glutton's pursuit of happiness is found in what they can do, not in what God will give them. The addictive quality of the pleasure-seeking is seated often enough, in this need for control over our own ability to be happy and full. It's no wonder, that Gluttony, rather than any other of the Seven Deadly Sins, is as pervasive in our culture as pleasure and gratification is instantaneous.

To take Gluttony seriously, as a serious sin, we must look in the mirror. It's easier to lament the evil that is large, systemic, political, natural, and cosmic than to admit that it is personal. When personifying gluttony, the Renaissance painters, poets, and writers like Chaucer, and Dante, all portray the glutton as someone who looks suspiciously like me, I am a glutton.

“Temperance: Giving up Control”

Now, one might imagine that contentment, like greed, is the balm for gluttony. But Gluttony cannot find or conceive of contentment when consuming is its focus. Because gluttony is a misplaced hunger, we need to reorient it and put our hunger in the right places. This is why I believe, Temperance, Moderation, Self-Control, whatever you call it, is the remedy to Gluttony. And one way to exercise some of that self control is through the Spiritual Practice of fasting.

I’ve been having ‘strange dreams’ as of late. Since fasting from meat for Lent, I’ve had some odd dreams involving meat; canned ham was a highlight the other night, I don’t like, or eat canned ham, but there it was in my dreams. And this past week I was craving a nice toasted Rueben sandwich. When something’s missing, you’re body knows consciously and subconsciously. What this experience of fasting has done for me, more than other attempts at fasting, has put into stark reality how much of my attention, and diet, was meat oriented. It used to be, that when we would meal plan, the first question was to wonder what meat we’re building our meal around, beef, pork, chicken. Now, we’re wondering what part of the world we want to visit with our flavours, middle-eastern, Indian style curry, Asian inspired stir-fry’s, or simple stick to your ribs Western cooking. We’ve developed a nice library of meatless meals for any given day of the week.

What this practice has shown this glutton, is that we can change things. Gluttony, sometimes, requires a reset, a pause, a startling moment of reorientation, so that we can return to the object of our desire with some self-control, some temperance. Fasting is one of the spiritual practices which can help with this. Fasting helps us re-orient ourselves because, when we fast, our voracious hunger is put into perspective.

And it should be noted while fasting is often associated with food, it doesn’t need to be just from food. Anything where we consume without thinking; anything we consume without care for others, for instance, screen time, shopping, exercise (yes, there can be too much of a good thing), news, and the list could go on, we can fast from. Fasting is a hard break, and when we attend to our longings in the midst of our fast, when we take the opportunity to reflect, much can be revealed to us about our out-of-control consumption, about how much Gluttony has taken control.

Fasting about freeing ourselves from that which binds us and holds us hostage; in today’s case I’m suggesting that it’s the chains of Gluttony; our relentless consumption which holds us

hostage. Fasting isn't about voluntary suffering, it's not about depriving yourself of something, it's about placing your hunger in a different place. AND it's about trusting in God; trusting in God's provision that God will answer the prayer, give us this day the food we need; it's about heeding God's instructions for the Israelites, to gather enough mana for this day. Trusting that there will be more tomorrow.

Breaking free of Gluttony, also means redirecting our all-consuming hunger. If Gluttony is about consuming when others have nothing, then the other side, whether we call it, temperance, self-control, or moderation, is about justice, making sure that *all* have something to eat, as Isaiah says, sharing our bread with those who need it, helping the homeless find shelter, covering the naked when they have nothing to wear. Or as Jesus would say, "hungering and thirsting for righteousness sake."

Fasting, I believe, can be a call to justice. By redirecting the hunger that Gluttony instigates, we can find a fullness that comes from God. Jesus says so much in the second part of the beatitude. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness sake, for they will be filled." And, as Isaiah says,

"If you remove the yoke from among you,
the finger-pointing, the wicked speech;
if you open your heart to the hungry,
and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted,
your light will shine in the darkness;
your gloom will be like the noon.

Fasting is a practice that makes us keenly aware of our dependence on God. Where gluttony would give our spirits a quick hit, whether it's 'fast food', 'fast fashion', 'fast furniture', 'fast style', or anything else 'fast', the spiritual practice of Fasting would tell us to wait on God, let God feed us with the bread of Life, from which we would never hunger again.

And while fasting might be the hard break that creates space for us to re-orient ourselves, how we break our fast is just as important. When we break our fast, not to be confused with the morning meal, our challenge is figuring out how will we live into what we learned.

For me, I have become aware of the amount of meat in my diet and how much meat is the focus of the Western diet. And while I knew before how much of the earth's resources it took

to bring that meat to my plate and also how much that meat cost at the grocery store, I didn't let it sink in; that is, until now. Seeing the end of my fast on the horizon, I'm emboldened to figure out how to moderately include meat in my diet again, perhaps making 'meat a treat' instead of the core of my diet. While the practice of fasting is about abstaining, it's abstaining to gain perspective, self-control, moderation, temperance is the practice of living into our learning.

If Gluttony's soul is gaunt, the soul of the one who Fast, who redirects their hunger, is filled. Fasting teaches us to lean into God. To wait on God, rather than on ourselves. Fasting teaches us reliance on God's goodness. Fasting teaches us that we are not able to meet our deepest soul hunger on our own; only God can do that. Temperance, moderation and self control give us the confidence to pray:

God is Great
God is Good
We thank God for our food.
By God's hands, we all are fed.

Thank you, God, for daily bread.

Amen.