



MY TWO CENTS

Temptations in Old Age

Martin Pender, May 2018

INTRODUCTION

Many people seem to think that the older they get, the more temptation will flee from them. Well, sorry to burst your bubble by shooting the arrow of truth into your hearts! Older people just face different temptations than the young.

In the Swedish language, there is a proverb that says, "När fan blir gammal, blir han präst". Literally translated, this proverb says, "When the devil gets old, he becomes a priest", meaning that when a person gets old, he becomes holier. However, that is not the whole story.

While we might expect sainthood from the aged, sin stands and waits patiently outside the door through all stages of life. There are many temptations during adolescence and also during middle age, but they do not suddenly cease once a person puts on the mileage!

Having ministered in the Church for many years, I have seen how the sins of despair, losing faith, doubt, gluttony and feeling worthless can make their home in the hearts of older people. These sins are, in fact, very prevalent. In addition to this, the reality of ill-health and the enormous challenge this can place on a person both spiritually and psychologically can become a mammoth hurdle for many.

There are many temptations most older people have to face in their lives. Here is my take on the top five common temptations people have when they get older.

MORBIDITY

When you are young, the reality of death is not something close to your heart, in fact, the only time the thought enters into the minds of the young is when they have to deal with the death of others.

When you begin reading the obituaries in the newspapers, be aware of your motives. Maybe you are looking far too closely at the average age of those who have died. This can become an unhealthy habit as you unconsciously begin your own countdown, thinking you are living on "borrowed time." For the first time in my life, I find myself living in a country where there is a special time on the local radio stations for "the deaths", as it is expressed here in the local lingo, and I have often heard people in casual conversation say that "they listen to the deaths on the radio".

You also find that older people attend funerals more often than others do. This can tempt older adults to succumb to morbid despair. Yes, it is true that older people want to pay their respects and honour the memory of those who have died. Indeed, this is very honourable and very Christian. But my experience is that priests have very little to say about heaven or the resurrection, even at funerals. They focus instead on celebrating the life and work of the dead person as if all that counts is what people do in life. Instead of a liturgy of intercessory prayer for the person who has died, the funeral liturgy becomes "a celebration of life". This is not necessarily a proper understanding of liturgy.

STINGINESS

Most people think that older people have money stashed away, but this is not really the case for the majority of the elderly. Try living on an old-age pension and see how far you can get! Those who do have money are often tempted to cling to it more tightly. When older people look around and see others who have been abandoned to fend for themselves, they get fearful that they, too, will be left with nothing.

A younger person can always say, "Well, I can work harder and replace that money easily enough" but older people do not have that possibility. The elderly are tempted to trust in Mammon to save them. The sin of putting your trust in money is very prevalent among the old. You may feel secure if you have money, but that will not make your life more joyful. Getting older can result in stinginess.

SELFISHNESS

Selfishness knows no age discrimination and people of all ages are plagued with self-centeredness, but older people have more time on their hands to become selfish. Having worked hard all their lives, they expect the last stages of their earthly existence to be "payback time", or as people often say "get what's due to me".

Yes, it is true that after working hard we expect some "creature comforts", but living only for yourself is selfish.

I remember when I visited the US many years ago, I was driving on the motorway and a car overtook me at great speed. On the back of the vehicle, the driver had placed a bumper sticker that said: "I'm spending my

children's inheritance." Selfishness is something many elderly people need to tackle.

BITTERNESS

I am sure that you have met many people like Victor Meldrew from "One Foot in the Grave". Some people become bitter as they age.

How does this bitterness happen? Well, having unrealistic expectations is a huge factor. When you begin to see "the silver threads among the gold", convinced that old age would be a bright, active time of significant influence and activity, denying the difficulties of old age, you are sowing the seed of bitterness in your soul. When the dream of a carefree retirement does not materialise, you become bitter. You can be tempted to feel they you have gotten a raw deal, or that you have been ripped off.

FEELING ABANDONED

A dangerous trend in our modern world is that a person's worth is measured by how much money they contribute to society. This can cause many older people to feel like castaways, resulting in that loneliness becomes an older person's most frequent visitor. Children get busy with their careers and move away. Friends have died or moved away to be with their children. Letter-writing has disappeared and if the aged have no Internet connection they hear almost nothing from others.

The only use they seem to have is "babysitting duty". They feel that they are not taken seriously and seldom get asked for advice. They feel abandoned, and so they are tempted to hold their own pity party. They might even wonder if God too has abandoned them. Surrendering to feeling abandoned is a common temptation older people have to face.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Old age can be a time of great maturity and joy if we approach the whole issue of life as a journey towards eternity. Knowing that the best part about getting older is that you stop trying to prove anything to anyone, including yourself, gives you peace of soul.

No matter how old you are, life is meant to be lived, no matter what station you are at. When you arrive at the station of old age, do not be tempted to make others miserable by never enjoying yourself.

C.S. Lewis, one of the great Christian writers of all time, was once asked to write an epitaph for a woman called Martha Clay, a woman who, during her old age, was somewhat cynical and bitter. This is what he wrote:

Erected by her sorrowing brothers
in memory of Martha Clay.
Here lies one who lived for others.
Now she has peace.
And so have they!

What will your epitaph say about you?