

**‘So that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted.’**

***Heb 12:3***

The dog days of summer. The phrase ‘dog days’ comes from the fact that the star Sirius, the Dog Star, rises at the same time of day as the sun, and the dog days of summer refer to the hot and sultry weeks from the end of July to the beginning of September. These days are often marked by lethargy, inactivity, or indolence. There is a holiday mood, even for people who are not actually on holiday, and there is for many people a sense of relaxation and of unwinding a little. And this is all to the good.

It is appropriate, then, that today’s Second Reading exhorts us not to grow weary or faint-hearted in the practice of our Catholic Faith. We may relax a little because of warmer and sunnier weather but we must be on our guard against relaxing our wakefulness against the assaults of the devil. Elsewhere, St Peter warns us to ‘be sober and [to] watch because [...]our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour’ (1 Pt 5:8). And Our Lord Himself tells us that no man who looks back, having once put his hand to the plough, is fit for the kingdom of God (Lk 9:62). Rather, ‘he that shall persevere to the end shall be saved, says Our Lord’ (Mt 10:22).

Many of you will have heard me say that the life of virtue is not glamorous. It involves a lot of plodding on, and of doing the same good things day after day. The trouble is, we frail human beings often go in search of novelty. We’re always looking for something new, something different, something to bring a little variety to our days. The designers of internet technology know this, and they have deliberately designed algorithms that play on this hunger for novelty. Very cleverly, we are lulled into the trap of swiping just one more time or of tapping on just one more icon, until we find we have wasted hours of our time. But worse than that, we become used to the immediacy – the instantaneous nature – of the

feedback we get from clicking on this or that until reaching for the iPhone or the iPad becomes automatic as soon as our fingers, or our minds, have nothing else to focus on. We are drawn into an online world.

Strangely, even looking for good things on the internet, such as articles about the Catholic Faith or suggestions for Catholic prayer and devotions, still involve this psychological itch to search and swipe, and swipe and search, until we can become more addicted to searching than we are attached to the thing we were originally searching for.

But many hundreds of years ago, St Augustine warned us of this in his *Confessions* when he said, ‘You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts shall not rest until they rest in you.’ Pope Leo himself quoted this line in his homily to mark the beginning of his pontificate in May earlier this year. Cleverly, tech. designers and programmers have tapped into this restlessness which we all experience, but in these dog days of summer it is worth remembering that only Christ can satisfy the deepest longing of our hearts, and even internet searches for Christ can sap us of our spiritual energies and cause the freshness of Christ Himself to fade.

Instead, the Church, in Her wisdom, has always encouraged a quite different approach to our spiritual life. Instead of continually searching for something new, the saints encourage us to be guided by the liturgical year of the Church, by Her appointed feast days and fast days, and the prayers of the Mass for example, and to follow a settled path through the turning of the seasons, not continually changing our set prayers but establishing a routine. We should not allow ourselves to be distracted by a longing for novelty, even – and especially – in the spiritual life, but instead we do well stick to a life of regular prayers, to a routine in prayer, that will carry us through the spiritual highs as well as through the troughs of despondency, that will carry us through the freshness of spring as well as through the dog days of summer and the sharp frosts of winter.

Do not grow weary or faint-hearted with what is good just because it is the same day after day. As St Paul says elsewhere, Let us not grow weary in doing good (Gal 6:9). Rather, we should cling to the good, and even prefer it to father, or son, or mother, or daughter, or mother-in-law, or daughter-in-law. As St Benedict teaches us in his *Rule*, we should ‘prefer nothing to the love of Christ’ (*Rule*, ch. 4).

It is sometimes hard to find delight in the things that never change, but this is what is meant by the spiritual gift of piety, one of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit given in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Piety is the gift by which we delight in God and the things of God. But we cannot delight in what remains unchanging if we are always giving in to our desire for novelty, for new experiences, even new spiritual experiences. We must, as it says in the Psalms, learn to be still and to see that the One whom, deep down, we are *really* seeking is the unchanging God of love (Ps 45:11).

Do not grow weary or faint-hearted.