

# Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

## The Screwtape Letters- by C.S. Lewis

### Part 12: Enjoying Life<sup>1</sup>

Over the past ten years, television has been inundated with “reality” shows. Unfortunately, most of these shows are so far from reality that they actually distract their viewers from what is real. C.S. Lewis, in his book, The Screwtape Letters, reminds us that living in authentic reality brings us great joy, while avoiding reality brings desolation and sin.

The senior demon, Screwtape, is perturbed that his nephew, Wormwood, has allowed a man who he is tempting to enjoy two authentic pleasures—reading a good book and taking a nice walk. He explains his perturbation, writing, “You allowed [the man] two real positive Pleasures. Were you so ignorant as not to see the danger in this? The characteristic of Pains and Pleasures is that they are unmistakably real, and therefore, as far as they go, give the man who feels them a touchstone of reality.”<sup>2</sup> Screwtape knows all-too-well that authentic reality draws us closer to God, whose very nature is Reality. Pain and pleasure both have the ability to save us from the trappings of fantasy and envy.

The gauge of whether or not pain and pleasure bring us joy in life is whether they are experienced in selfishness or in relationship with God. If they are experienced in pure selfishness, they can lead us deeper into the abyss of self-centeredness. However, if they are experienced in the context of our relationship with God they can turn our minds from ourselves to the things of heaven. Ironically, if we live in *authentic reality* long enough we find ourselves becoming more and more detached from the things of this world.

Screwtape has a profound understanding of the detachment that leads to joy. Most of the time when we think about “detaching” from the things of this world, we think about fasting, abstinence, and giving up the things we love. Screwtape shares a different view, writing, “The man who truly and disinterestedly enjoys any one thing in the world, for its own sake, and without caring two-pence what other people say about it, is by that very fact forearmed against some of the subtlest modes of [spiritual] attack.”<sup>3</sup>

Screwtape’s definition of detachment makes sense in light of the gross exaggeration and excess we find in the world, and can, in fact, be more spiritually beneficial than fasting and abstaining from something. For example, a person might “give up” beer during Lent, only to binge on it every Sunday. This does not show the same spiritual maturity as the one who is disinterested in whether or not they have a beer or a glass of water. The former is a test in endurance, the latter is authentic detachment.

Joy and, therefore, spiritual maturity require our willingness to stop and smell the proverbial roses in life, not caring what they smell like, but simply entering into the reality of the moment.

Over the past year, we have explored twelve topics that C.S. Lewis chose to include in his book, The Screwtape Letters. It has been a great blessing for me to re-read this wonderful book and to explore these various Christian ideas. One particular blessing for me has been the great reminder that evil can be very subtle—often hidden behind the veil of our own rationalizations, sinful inclinations, and resistance to self-denial. If you have not had a chance to read Lewis’ book, I encourage you to enjoy its short, but profound, message.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is part twelve of a twelve part series that I am writing on C.S. Lewis’ The Screwtape Letters.

<sup>2</sup> The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis, HarperSanFrancisco, 2001, pg. 64.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 66.