

Be fructuous and brief in what you tell  
 And may God send you grace to do it well!  
 Say what you please; you will be gladly heard.'  
 So he began his sermon, on the word.

## The Parson's Tale

*The Parson's tale is a prose sermon on the proper preparation for Confession and the true nature of the Seven Deadly Sins. It seems therefore to lead naturally to Chaucer's Retractions which follow it. On the literal plane of meaning it seems to be offered as an appropriate ending to a pilgrimage before the Saint's shrine is reached. On the allegorical plane, referred to by the Parson when first called upon for a story, it may be deemed a preparation for a last confession to be made on 'that perfect, glorious pilgrimage' that is called the celestial, to the Heavenly Jerusalem.*

*A brief summary of the Parson's sermon here follows:*

*God desires no man to perish and there are many spiritual ways to the celestial city. One noble way is Penitence, the lamenting for sin and the will to sin no more. The root of the tree of Penitence is contrition, the branches and the leaves are confession, the fruit satisfaction, the seed grace, and the heat in that seed the Love of God.*

*Contrition is the heart's sorrow for sin. Sin may be venial or deadly. Venial sin is for one to love Christ less than he ought. Deadly sin is to love a creature more than the Creator. Venial sin may lead to deadly sin. There are seven deadly sins of which the first is pride.*

*Pride is shown in many forms: arrogance, impudence, boasting, hypocrisy, joy in having done harm, etc. It may be inward or outward. Outward pride is like a tavern sign that shows there is wine in the cellar. It may show itself in too many clothes or too few, or in the carriage of the body, as when the buttocks jut as it were the hinder parts of a she-ape in the full of the moon. One can show sinful pride in retinue, in ostentatious hospitality, in one's strength, in one's gentility. The remedy for Pride is Humility or true self-knowledge.*

*Envy is sorrow at the prosperity of others and joy in their hurt. It is the worst of sins as it sets itself against all other virtues and goodness, and is*

*flatly against the Holy Ghost, source of Bounty. Backbiting and grumbling are the Devil's Paternoster.*

*The remedy for Envy is to love God, your neighbour, and your enemy.*

*Anger is the wicked will to vengeance. Anger against wickedness, however, is good, wrath without bitterness. Wicked anger is either sudden or premeditated; the latter is the worse. Malice aforethought chases the Holy Ghost out of the soul. It is the devil's furnace and heats hatred, manslaughter, treachery, lies, flattery, scorn, discord, menaces, and curses. The remedy for Anger is Patience.*

*Accidie does all tasks with vexation, slackly and without joy, and is encumbered by doing good. It restrains one from prayer. It is the rotten-hearted sin of Sloth. It leads to despair. The remedy is Fortitude.*

*Avarice is a lecherous desire for earthly things, a kind of idolatry. Every florin in one's coffer is a mommet, an idol. It leads to feudal extortions by lords from their villeins, to fraud, to simony, gambling, theft, false-witness, sacrilege. The remedy is Mercy or 'pity largely taken'.*

*Gluttony is an immeasurable appetite to eat or drink. Drunkenness is the horrible sepulchre of man's reason. The remedy is Abstinence, Temperance, and Sobriety.*

*Lechery is near cousin to Gluttony. It has many forms and is the greatest sin of theft there is, for it steals body and soul. The remedy is Chastity and Continence, and not to eat or drink too much. When the pot boils strongly the best remedy is to withdraw the fire.*

*Confession must be freely willed and made in full faith. A man must only confess his own sins, and truthfully with his own mouth, not painted with subtle words. It must be a considered, not a hasty act, and frequent.*

*Satisfaction consists generally in alms-giving, penance, fasting, and bodily pains. Its fruit is endless bliss in Heaven.*



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