

## Chapter 19: Fifth Ledge — Avarice and Wastefulness (Purgatory)

Just before dawn, a time when dreams sometimes bring truth, Dante dreamed about a hag — a stutterer and stumbler, with crossed eyes, yellow skin, and hands deformed as if by arthritis. Dante stared at her, and under his gaze the hag changed and became gradually beautiful.

The now beautiful woman spoke, “I am a Siren. I am she who sings sweetly and entices sailors to crash their ships upon my shores. I am the Siren who convinced Ulysses to stray from his path. Anyone who spends time with me seldom leaves because I satisfy them.”

Ulysses sought dangerous knowledge. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Circe told him about his upcoming voyage, “First you will come to the island of the Sirens, who enchant men with their lovely song. Sailors who hear their song crash their ships on the Sirens’ island, whose shores are strewn with the bones of men. Sail quickly past the Sirens! Your men must not hear their song. Soften beeswax and plug their ears with it. But if you must hear their song, have your men tie you to the mast so that you don’t jump overboard and swim to their island and die. Tell your men that when you order them to untie you, they must tie you tighter.” Ulysses did this, and he heard the song of the Sirens and lived.

The Siren had barely finished speaking before a Heavenly lady appeared to defend Dante and said to Virgil, “What is this? Do your duty!”

Virgil then stepped up the Siren and ribbed her garment from the top to below her belly. A stench then poured forth, and Dante gagged and woke up.

Virgil said, “I have been calling you three times now. You are slothful, and you are not acting like the saved souls purging their sin on this ledge.”

Dante followed Virgil.

As Dante walked, he was thinking about his dream. He was stooped over and resembled half of a bridge. He then heard a soft, kindly voice say, “This is the way up.”

An angel’s wings fanned Dante and erased one of the remaining P’s on his forehead, and the angel said, “Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted.”

Virgil asked Dante, “What are you thinking about?”

Dante replied, “I had a dream that I cannot stop thinking about.”

Virgil knew Dante’s thoughts, and he knew the dream that Dante had had. He said to Dante, “You saw an evil witch that causes the sinners on the three upper ledges to mourn. You also saw how to escape from her.

“The Siren was once hideous but then seemed beautiful, just as a sin is repulsive at first but when habitually engaged in seems attractive. Think of addiction to tobacco, which a later age will regard as at least a bad habit. Anyone smoking a first cigarette is likely to have a very unpleasant experience, with coughing and, in some cases, vomiting. But continued smoking makes a person an addict to tobacco, and smoking becomes a pleasure — until it results in disease. But a better example is perhaps food. Food is necessary and eating too much of it can be pleasurable, but eating too much can lead to obesity and disease. What seemed good at first — overeating — can very quickly show that it is bad in reality. The same is true of other sins, which sometimes can have an attractive veneer but which always have an ugly reality.

“In your dream, a Heavenly lady and I came to your rescue. I know reason well, and reason is important in recognizing what is good and bad. But more is needed than reason. The Heavenly lady represents divine guidance, which is something that is outside of reason. With reason and divine guidance, you can recognize sin and see how ugly it is in reality rather than be taken in by the attractive

vener it at first seems to have. Reason and divine guidance can and should work together.

“Please realize that the Siren is a liar. She said that she convinced Ulysses to stray from his path. That is not true. Ulysses’ path went by the Siren. Ulysses was able to hear the song of the Siren and survive. He ordered his men to tie him to the mast of his ship so he could not jump overboard and swim to the Island of the Siren. His crewmen, however, put wax in their ears so that they could perform their duties without hearing the song of the Siren. Ulysses heard the song of the Siren, but he did not deviate from his path.”

This is partially correct. Ulysses did not deviate from his literal path: His attempt to return to his home island of Ithaca continued. But his attempt to acquire knowledge of all things, bad and good, deviate from the path to ought to have taken: to acquire knowledge of what is good to know.

Virgil then said, “Let us continue climbing. Look upward. Paradise is calling to you.”

A tame falcon will stay still until its master calls for it to soar. Now Dante strained to climb higher.

Dante and Virgil reached the fifth ledge of the mountain. There they saw saved souls, in tears, lying face down, their backs to the heavens and their faces looking at dust. Their hands and feet were bound.

Dante heard the souls say a prayer that was taken from Psalm 119 — “*Adhaesit Pavimento Anima Mea*” or “My Soul Cleaves Unto the Dust”:

“My soul cleaves unto the dust: quicken You me according to Your word.

“I have declared my ways, and You heard me: teach me Your statutes.

“Make me to understand the way of Your precepts: so shall I talk of Your wondrous works.

“My soul melts for heaviness: strengthen You me according to Your word.

“Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me Your law graciously.

“I have chosen the way of truth: Your judgments have I laid before me.

“I have stuck unto Your testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.

“I will run the way of Your commandments, when You shall enlarge my heart.”

Virgil said to the saved souls, “You will reach Paradise, and the purgation you are now undergoing is made easier by justice and the promise of Paradise. Please tell us how to reach the steps that lead upward.”

A saved soul said, “If you are not required to spend time on this ledge purging your sin, go to the right, and you will find the steps that lead upward.”

Dante thought, *This saved soul has mistaken Virgil and me for saved souls who do not need to spend time on this ledge. Some souls can skip ledges, if they are not guilty of the sin purged on that ledge. Also, it is good to note once more that the saved souls in Purgatory are helpful.*

Dante also thought, *I would like to talk to this saved soul.*

Virgil, who knew Dante’s thoughts, nodded to him that it was OK to talk to the saved soul.

Dante said to the saved soul, “You are purifying yourself with tears, and you will see God. Please tell me who all of you were and why you weep in the dust. Also, can I help you in some way in the Land of the Living when I return?”

The saved soul replied, “I will tell you soon why we lie in the dust with our backs to Heaven, but first let me say that I was a successor to Saint Peter. In the Land of the Living, I was Pope Adrian V. I was Pope for only 38 days, but that was enough time for me to learn how difficult it is to be a good and virtuous Pope. I converted very late in life. When I became Pope, I understood how false the world is. I

realized that true peace could not be found in this world. I instead sought the true peace that is found in Paradise.

“Until I came to the realization of the falseness of the world, I was greedy and I was separated from God. On this ledge we are punished for being greedy in life. Because we looked at money and material possessions in the Land of the Living instead of looking to God, on this ledge our purgation is to look at the dust of the ground and to turn our backs on God. Our hands and feet are bound because we used them to pursue money and material possessions with too much zeal in the Land of the Living. This is the worst punishment on the mountain.”

Dante thought, *Each sinner is most horrified by his or own sin, and so each sinner regards his or her punishment as the worst because he or she must think constantly about that particular sin.*

*This purgation is just because the avaricious turned their backs on Heaven, instead choosing to look toward money and material things. Now they are forced not to look toward Heaven. Because they used their hands and feet to pursue money and material things, now their hands and feet are tied.*

Dante kneeled.

The saved soul said to him, “Why are you kneeling to me?”

Dante replied, “You have been a Pope. You have had high office.”

The saved soul replied, “Please rise to your feet. Do not kneel to me. I am a servant, as are you and all the other souls here, of God. You know the words of Jesus when he was asked by the Pharisees which of seven husbands a woman had had in the Land of the Living would that woman be married to in Paradise: ‘For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels who are in Heaven.’”

“In the Land of the Living, I was married to my diocese, but now I am not married. The title of Pope is not applicable to one in the afterlife, and therefore you ought not to kneel to me.

“Please do not stay longer. Please let me go back to purging my sin. Let me cry in penance. In the Land of the Living, I have a niece named Alagia. I hope that she may retain her goodness and not be led astray. There is no lack of bad examples that she could follow. She is all that remains to me in the Land of the Living.”

Dante thought, *The saved souls in Purgatory still care about and wish the best for people who are still in the Land of the Living. Also, on this ledge Virgil and I see the former Pope Adrian V being purged of the sin of greed. Of course, the Simoniac Popes in the Inferno were greedy, but they did not repent their sins before dying.*