

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 17, 2019

“It is evident that we can exert no real or profound influence upon our fellow-men unless we live a truly interior life ourselves.”

(Rev. R. Garrigou-LaGrange, The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life, p. 1)

Later this month, we will gather together with family and friends to celebrate Thanksgiving Day. On this day we are encouraged to reflect upon the many blessings we have received from the hand of God and express our gratitude by sharing a meal with those we most love. Yet, intertwined with our thankfulness is a notion that all of this must come to an eventual end. This sobering thought is echoed in today’s gospel reading as Jesus predicts the inevitable destruction of that which the Jewish community held most dear and sacred - the Temple of God in Jerusalem. As Catholics, we may be used to hearing joyful homilies of God’s love and mercy, but the death, destruction, and decay of that which we, like our Jewish ancestors, hold most dear must also be recalled. One day I will die and on that day, God will reward me with what I most wanted and valued during my earthly life.

Psalm 23, read so often at funerals, begins with these words: *“The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.”* Have you ever just reflected upon what it is that you most deeply want? As a Catholic and a priest, I would hope that my answer would be: Heaven. However, if I honestly reflect upon my behavior, I find myself wondering if my actions betray this heartfelt desire. As Jesus warned His apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane: *“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* (Matthew 26:41)

What are we to do, my dear people, if we find ourselves unsure of our answer? I found myself returning to the first words of Jesus in Matthew 26:41 where our Lord said: *“Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test.”* We are asked to watch over our actions and pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance during our test. The Holy Spirit is more than willing to assist us in this process through three ways: purgation, illumination, and unification. These, joined together, form a continuous triangle of spiritual growth and development.

The start of our eternal life began the day we were baptized. As the water was poured over our heads, original sin was washed away and we were immersed into the life of sanctifying grace. We were, at that moment, united profoundly with God and encouraged to remain in this state of baptismal innocence all of our lives. As painful as it is to admit, we too often have failed in this endeavor. We have rejected God’s generous invitation to dwell with Him forever in heaven through giving into our sinful inclinations. Under the prayerful inspiration of the Holy Spirit our minds are illuminated toward these, our failings. Thus, beginning the long and painful process of purgation. We must spend our lives purging ourselves through sacramental confession, absolution, and renewing our firm purpose to remain unified with God in a life of sanctifying grace. We are destined to move from being unified, to becoming enlightened, to painful purgation until at last we receive the eternal reward of total unity with God in the eternal life of heaven. Let us not become discouraged when it appears we are not making any progress along this road toward holiness. God beckons us to join Him and endows us with His very love, the Holy Spirit, to assist us. Jesus knew this would be our lot and therefore encouraged us with those hope-filled words: *“Let not your hearts be troubled.”* (John 14:1) and *“Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20)