

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 20, 2020

“Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near.” (Isaiah 55:6)

In his spiritual classic, “The Spiritual Exercises,” Saint Ignatius of Loyola recounted this story. *“A German prince, wishing to inspire his son with a great horror of war, ordered a painter to represent the different scenes of a bloody battle and to write these words at the bottom of the picture: ‘Behold the fruits of war!’ Imitate this prince, you who meditate at this moment on the fall of our first parents; represent to yourself all the evils that have followed it and say to yourself: ‘Behold the fruits of sin.’”*

Saint Ignatius’ story reminds us of the reality of our world which is filled with the choices and consequences of fallen man. If we were to consider all of the sufferings we either see displayed before our eyes or read through our news outlets, it would seem over-whelming. Violence, misery, wars, disasters, sickness, crimes committed, children deprived of life and happiness, and so many, many more. One may wonder if any of these ills could have been avoided. To answer this question, I am forced to wonder if I could have avoided the many pitfalls I have so freely stumbled into during my own life?

We could easily answer that these miseries are unavoidable due to our (mankind’s) sinful nature. So many sufferings are the result of sinful choices on either our part or another’s. But I ask again, could at least some of these have been avoided? I will propose to you an answer of “Yes, some miseries could be avoided,” provided we, or another, had followed the advice of Isaiah and sought the Face of God. Yet, what is the Face of God that we should be seeking? What am I searching for? How will I know if I find it? If I miss it the first time, will it come around a second time? Considering these and similar questions, the sheer number of imaginative, anxiety inducing situations which may or may not arise will have a paralyzing effect if we are not careful.

If we are to attempt to seek the Face of God, as Isaiah instructed, then we must begin within. We must commit ourselves to a careful examination of our lives. Not only must we reflect upon our past, we need also call up the courage to reflect upon our future. Please excuse me, I do not intend to sound cold or cruel with my example, but have you ever seen an older neglected cemetery? One with head stones either broken down from the weather or covered with mold so black you could barely make out the name? One which is overgrown with weeds and trees? Did it not occur to you then, that these things are all that is left of - Someone? It really does not matter who, but a living, breathing person filled with hopes and dreams is symbolized by these broken down, weatherworn monuments. For all the good or bad, the wealth or poverty, the achievements or failures, a person’s life ended. For all of our accomplishments, no one cheats death.

Seeking the Face of God must begin from within each one of us, guided by the certain fact that we are going to die. Now, this knowledge provides a great freedom. We are free to choose those persons and things which will lead us to God’s Face. We can now reject, if only slightly at first, those suggestions from demons and men which encourage us that we still have time. “Eat, drink, enjoy today, repent and believe - tomorrow.” To seek the Face of God must begin from within, from my limited mortality, and extend out to those persons and things which will best allow and assist me to recognize His Face.