

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 13, 2022
Year of Saint Joseph

“I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.” (Jeremiah 17:10)

We are presented today with an important image found in the Old Testament books of Jeremiah and the Psalms. It is the image of “the tree planted beside flowing waters.” This image was highly useful for both Jeremiah and the Psalmist for it symbolically conveyed a message of righteousness as opposed to infidelity. Allow me to explain using Saint Thomas Aquinas as our chief guide. The image of the tree symbolizes the righteous individual in two ways which we will now reflect upon.

First, for a tree to flourish, it must have a sturdy root system. St. Thomas would define this as being “well rooted.” For a tree to have a sturdy root system, certain criteria must be found present. There must be a source of water and soil fertile enough to sustain its needs. Without these two main factors, a tree may grow, but it may never realize its most full potential. Without these, its roots may not be sturdy enough to sustain it during times of draught, excessive winds, or flooding. This image reminds us that we too will need to have a sturdy root system to nourish us during similar unfortunate and overly fortunate times in our own lives. The temptation to let our faith life wither away due to a draught caused by little or no grace received from God (meaning we fail to pray, especially failure to pray the greatest prayer we Catholics possess - the Mass). Also, we may find ourselves not properly grounded when times of plenty find us. Things begin to go so very well for us, we attribute our success to our own efforts and not His. And, as the old saying goes, “Pride cometh before the fall.”

Secondly, the righteous person, like the good tree, is known by the fruits of their labor. Although I am not an arborist by profession, I do feel confident enough to publicly declare that various trees produce various fruits. And, coupled with that, certain fruits are found naturally growing upon certain trees. I specifically use the word naturally here for I do realize that mankind does continue to practice the ancient horticultural methods of grafting and budding. Again, given all of the necessary conditions, a tree (like a fruit tree) can produce life-giving fruit. Consider the importance of certain fruits from fruit trees used to provide life sustaining Vitamin C to sailors to prevent scurvy in the days of masts, sails, and riggings. The Christian is likewise known by their fruit, their good deeds. For even our Lord Jesus knew it would never suffice to claim one is His follower, if that one did not exhibit the needed traits of His followers. Therefore, the Holy Spirit inspired Saint John to write these words: *“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”* (1 John 4:20 KJV - oddly, not solely a Catholic concept).

My dear family, for so very many of us, life will not offer us ideal growing conditions. We may, at times, feel we lack the necessary nourishment to continue living the Christian life. And this is exactly what the Devil wants us to believe. He wants us to focus on our imperfections, failures, sins, and regrets. Please, do not succumb to this madness. God has provided everything we need in and through His Catholic Church to grow and realize our full potential. And what is our full potential? It is to become saints in heaven. Dedicate yourselves to Him. See in His Church, Him, not the weak ambassadors who represent Him (Church Hierarchy). See Him, the great gardener, who wants to nurture you, prune you, nourish you, sustain you into becoming the greatest plant you are particularly called to be. For if He has planted you besides the waters of grace flowing from the pierced side of His Sacred Heart. Drink in deeply and be sustained.