

***The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time***  
***January 22, 2023***  
***Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant***

*“Our life during this earthly pilgrimage cannot be without temptations, for we make progress along life’s path precisely through our fight against temptations; nobody can know himself unless he has experienced temptation, nor can he be crowned if he has not been victorious, nor can he be victorious if he has not fought, nor can he fight if he has not enemies and temptations.” (Saint Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos)*

The Old Testament book of ***Psalms*** has become a favorite of many due to the rare emotion with which the psalmist, King David for most part, wrote. Psalm 27, our Responsorial Psalm for today’s Mass, is a worthwhile illustration of these emotions. This prayer arises from the heart of a king who, hounded by his enemies, yearns to see the face of God found present in His Temple. Due to the brevity of our Responsorial Psalm, verses 5 thru 12 have been left out. It is within these verses (7-10) that we find asked, most poignantly, the assistance of God for the psalmist feels abandoned by Him. Briefly, the psalmist reminds God that He (God) instructs mankind to “Seek His Face.” He informs God that he, the psalmist, is attempting to do that to the best of his ability. He expresses a heartfelt plea that although he is attempting to do this within the house of the Lord, God’s Temple, he cannot help but feel lost and abandoned. He is doing everything required, but he feels God has withdrawn His Presence from him and without God coming to his rescue, he will remain confused and broken. Despite his feelings, he concludes the prayer (Psalm 27) with a statement of hope for he knows that God will come to his rescue. All that is required of him now is to courageously wait and not despair.

I would like to highlight excerpts for you from a recent news article from The Christian Post. On Sunday, January 15, 2023, non-Christian terrorists sought to forcibly enter into the priests’ living residence of the parish of Saints Peter and Paul in the village of Kafin Koro in northern Nigeria. Finding themselves unable to do so, they set the building ablaze along with other church buildings. The charred body of Father Isaac Achi was found within the rubble. His assistant, Fr. Collins Omeh, escaped the building only to be shot. He was rushed to a local hospital and was still being treated at the time the article was written. A small insert within the article stunned me. It said: “Nigeria led the world in Christians killed for their faith in 2021 (Oct. 1, 2020, to Sept. 30, 2021) at 4,650, up from 3,530 the previous year, according to Open Doors’ 2022 World Watch List report.”

The purpose for my informing you of this incident is not to upset you. As I type this summary, I am aware that I will need to be prudent as I present this story from the prior paragraph in a church with younger children; however, we do need to be aware of what is happening to Christians in other parts of our world. The purpose is to express my own emotions in union with the author of Psalm 27. Even I, who have been called to shepherd this little part of God’s glorious flock, turn to God and feel directionless. Like so many of you, there are days

when I too read or listen to some bit of news and wonder where was God during that particular moment or event. As the psalmist begged God, why would He seem to hide His Face in the midst of blatant misery and suffering inflicted upon the innocent (children and babies) and so many adults just trying to daily live God-fearing lives. In one unified chorus with the psalmist, Job, and countless others, we ask: “Where God are You in the midst of our pain/suffering/loneliness/hopelessness/despair?” In essence, “Why God . . . ?”

I wish I was either smart enough or wise enough to provide that one original answer which would solve this perplexing question once for all. The only answer I can provide is—MAN. We, all mankind, are at fault. We may comfort ourselves, professing innocence (I did not kill anyone), yet never taking into account the way we spoke uncharitably (gossip) about another. I may not have committed X, but I did commit Y and probably enjoyed it as I did it. For example, a thief may not consider the harm done by his stealing, until someone proceeds to steal from him.

Yet, similar to the psalmist who concludes Psalm 27 on a note of hopefulness, I too would be remiss if I failed to do likewise. What should console and motivate us to continue pressing forward in the face of this often-overt anti-Godliness in the world is YOU. Each one of you here today, worshipping God in this church, are the reason for this hopefulness. As we look around, we see others who are going through the same or similar situations as we are. They are carrying burdens, asking questions, seeking God’s Face just as you or I are doing. We are here seeking support while, at this same time, receiving support from others. God is present within our midst in both His Sacramental Presence (the Eucharist) and His Mystical Body (you, His Church). As long as there are men and women praying in His Temple, the Church, He will always offer them His support in the most unlikely of ways, it seems, through His Presence radiating within each other.