

***Twenty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time***  
***September 10, 2023***  
***Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant***

*“To what can I compare you, O daughter Jerusalem? What example can I show you for your comfort, virgin daughter Sion? For great as the sea is your distress; who can heal you”*  
*(Lamentations 2:13)*

There is an old adage which states: “A picture is worth a thousand words.” If we could go back in time and speak with readers of the March 1941 edition of Life Magazine, they would attest to the truthfulness of this saying. Contained within the pages of this edition would be a photo which would later become referred to as “The Weeping or Crying Frenchman.” The photo, for those unfamiliar, was taken of a French gentleman crying as he stood watching the regimental flags of the country’s army being marched through the streets of Marseilles. These flags, and the soldiers who carried them, were destined for Africa choosing exile over surrender. In roughly six weeks, the proud French army had suddenly and unexpectedly collapsed due to the superior tactics of the German army. It was a stunning defeat. The shock, grief and despair captured on the face of this gentleman would resonate throughout the nation. How could this happen?

The story of first-born children of Israel, as told in our Old Testament, recounts a similar, tragic experience. Whereas the country of France had, what many considered, Europe’s most powerful army tucked safely behind the battlements of the Maginot Line, the citizens of Judah felt secure for they had, tucked securely behind the walls of Jerusalem, the Temple of God and His Presence found within. It is my assumption, if a picture had been taken of a member of the city as they watched the Temple’s sacred vessels, members of the royal house, leaders of the army and other leading citizens being paraded out of the gates of the city destined for exile in Babylon, we would be speaking of “The Weeping or Crying Israelite.” How could this happen?

The residents of Jerusalem, prior to its fall circa 586 BC, would have awakened each morning knowing that priests were offering sacrifices to God in the Temple. Despite the warnings of impending doom from random “odd” prophets, such as Jeremiah, they were assured that God would always protect them from conquest at the hands of the foreign nations which surrounded their borders. They had no need to either fear or repent of the immorality which many engaged in daily. To play off of the words of Ezekiel from our first reading, the citizens relied on the human strength of the watchmen who patrolled high upon the city’s walls, rather than taking to heart the words of God’s watchmen, His prophets, who walked the city’s streets. It would not be until the enemy had encamped around the gates and the citizens were starving for lack of food, when minds and hearts would finally begin to turn back to God. Yet by that point, the die had already been cast; their destruction was upon them. How could this happen?

There is another old adage which could help us with our reflection of this day: “Those who do not learn from history, are doomed to repeat it.” My family, are we any more secure at this

time than those who lived in France or Jerusalem in their own times? Rather than having a foreign nation at our borders looking to invade, we have our own mortality staring us in the face. This gift of life, so often taken for granted, is just that—a gift. It is a gift which can be taken away at any moment as we are called upon to give an accounting to God upon how we either used or squandered it. As Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and so many other watchmen before, might I offer my voice of warning as well. Let us daily examine our behaviors and attitudes in light of God’s commands to love Him and our neighbors. Let us repent of any and all sinfulness which may weaken or break our relationships with Him and our neighbor. Let us take this opportunity afforded us today to do these things, to either repair our lack of or further strengthen our call to sanctity. I shudder to think our first moment standing in the presence of God, upon our death, would be captured under the title of “The Weeping or Crying Christian.”