

Twenty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time
September 15, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #38

“So long as a man is ignorant of his defects and of their real nature, all his endeavor (be it ever so laudable) to overcome those defects will end in failure. Not infrequently we meet persons who, while sincerely bent on reforming, direct all their attention to merely imaginary faults of theirs, thus fighting against windmills and leaving their real defects untouched.” (Dietrich von Hildebrand, Transformation in Christ, p.43)

If one were to journey to Rome to visit ancient Christian/Catholic sites, the crypt of the "Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini" (Our Lady of the Conception of the Capuchins) would be a particularly interesting place to visit. The crypt consists of five chapels, each of which is decorated with the bones of Capuchin friars. Various bones, sometimes even complete skeletons, were used as symbolic decorations in these chapels. There is one boneless chapel where one finds an altar for the sacrifice of the Mass. In the last chapel there is found a small wooden placard with the special message *“Quello che voi siete noi eravamo, quello che noi siamo voi sarete”* (translated ***“Exactly what you are now, we once were, what we are now you will become”***).

I begin our reflection this weekend with the mentioning of this Capuchin crypt as its sign reminds all of the reality we daily face — We all will die. Yet the subject of our death is not something we should seek to dismiss. Many a person has tried to forget the certainty of their own mortality by neither speaking of nor reflecting upon their impending death. Others have sought medical assistance to prolong their lives or hide the wear inevitably placed upon their bodies by time. My family, allow me to quote a question to you from The Imitation of Christ by Thomas A Kempis: “What good is a long life if we do not use it to advance spiritually?”

The Eucharist, when properly received, offers us the much-needed grace to face our own death. Building upon what we have already discussed, our union with God (Heaven) began at our Baptism. We strive to remain free from sin thereby keeping this union intact. If we break this union by committing mortal sin (breaking a Commandment, for example), we should not hesitate to seek reconciliation with God through sacramental confession. In our desire to remain in union with God, we should be actively considering our death and the judgment which must occur based upon how we have chosen to live the life we were granted. In these considerations, we begin to understand how created things or other persons have influenced us both positively and negatively. These interactions will offer us two options: either they will assist us in our imitation of Jesus allowing us to remain in union with God or they will not. And this is where the Eucharist will provide us the grace, again, when received free of mortal sin, to make the necessary choices to purge those people or things from our lives which drive a wedge between God and ourselves.

I conclude with a final story taken from our Christian/Catholic history. When Christianity was still young in North Africa, certain individuals would choose to live lives of solitude, work and prayer in wilderness regions. These individuals would be known by the title

hermits. The most famous of these, Saint Anthony, lived between 250-350AD. It is told that some hermits would keep, as their sole companion, a skull of someone who had died. Saint Alphonsus recounts a story of one of these hermits in a homily he presented upon the certainty of death. I retell it for you now: "Thus, a certain hermit being asked at death, why he was so cheerful, answered: I have kept death always before my eyes; and therefore, now that it has arrived, I feel no terror." (Saint Alphonsus Liguori, Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost)