

Twenty-Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time
October 12, 2025
Year of the Holy Spirit

“A strong supernatural hope inclines you to view life with positive attitudes and a broader perspective.” (Anthony J. Paone, S.J., My Daily Life, p. 276)

In our reflection of last weekend, we addressed the idea of happiness from wealth. The conclusion we arrived at, with the assistance of Saint Thomas Aquinas, is wealth (natural and artificial) cannot provide a person true and lasting happiness. We will proceed further on our quest for what can bring us happiness, the result of the theological virtue of Hope, through an examination of honor, fame and power. Can the possession of any of these three genuinely make you happy?

(2) Can honor bring us happiness? The first question one must ask concerning honor should be: Why is this particular person being honored? To answer that question, we begin by acknowledging the idea which states: All desire to be honored but few understand what honor entails. At this time in our shared history, many are inclined to share in similar fashions or cultural fads. Many rebellious teenagers or college students claim to want to be “nonconformists.” Their “Declaration of Independence” is to rebel from the rules and values of their parents or older generations. Have you ever noticed, in their desire to stand apart, they seem to dress in similar fashions, hold similar ideas, eat similar foods (sushi anyone?), and speak using similar talking points and catch phrases. Young people desire to be honored for their choices and stances, not realizing that honor actually develops in the minds of others. The honor a person receives is formed in the mind of someone else who honors them for something excellent. Now, what one deems excellent is subject to that individual. The Nappie Awards (a Mobile tradition) is an excellent example. A minister can receive a Nappie as the “Best Minister,” but what makes them the best? Since the award is based upon the number of votes gathered, the criteria it is based upon can be extremely random. Happiness, by contrast, is found within each person. It is not subject to the ideals held by another. We can be happy with an excellence we have strived to attain even if that virtue is unknown to others. We need not receive an honor for doing those things we know are good, true, beautiful and virtuous. Those things are done because they are an expression of the happiness found within.

(3) Can fame bring us happiness? As we have stated with honor, fame too is not an internal feeling or thought. Like honor, fame is based upon others. A person is famous because they are well known. Please consider that definition for a moment. A person can be famous for a virtuous reason. Likewise, a person can be famous for a notorious reason. If we are honest with ourselves, we should strive daily to be well known by solely one person. His opinion of us is the only one that truly matters. The person of whom we are referring to is Jesus Christ (God). Daily we can present an image of who we are to others; with God, those efforts would be in vain. Only God possesses the ability to see us for who we truly are. It is His Words, His Laws, which provide us with meaning. They shape our identity which further shapes our understanding of reality. We are Christian; this is a part of our identity, who we are. This part of our identity shapes how we will approach life in general and ours in particular. As stated previously, we do the good because

it is good and we receive happiness from it. To that statement, we add, we do the good not solely because it perpetuates happiness, but it informs others of who we are. Most importantly, it affirms our knowledge of God and His knowing us.

(4) Can power bring us happiness? Saint Thomas, in his explanation of this question, would offer two thoughts. The first was a reminder that happiness, happiness with God, is the true end of each person. Power is a means to attain this end. This is important because some seek or attempt to gain and even gain power as an end, the end. One can seek to claim power thinking that once they are powerful then they will be filled with happiness. Returning to our understanding of the Christian identity, power is displayed by those Christians who choose to love over choosing to act differently. This directly moves us into the second thought of Saint Thomas. Happiness, love in union with God, is more powerful than any power we may gain while living today. Unlike love, power may be possessed by both virtuous and nefarious individuals. The way we use the power we possess can be very different if a man's heart is filled with God or Evil. History provides us with many examples of dictators who, using their power, committed horrific atrocities. It is the freedom to love, most especially, to love those who either neglect us or mistreat and abuse us in which true power is found. The numerous martyred saints of Christianity are reminders to us of the power of love uniting us to God. We may not be able to recall the name of the World War II guard who injected poison into the arms of a select few starving men in the Auschwitz concentration camp; but, many of us will know the name of one of those starving men, a Catholic priest, Saint Maximilian Kolbe. Power, along with honor and fame, does not offer happiness.