

Extraordinary Form – 3rd Sunday of Lent

Ave Maria Catholic Church, Sunday, March 3, 2024. Fr. David M Vidal

Ephesians 5: 1–9

Brethren: be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma. Immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is fitting among holy ones, no obscenity or silly or suggestive talk, which is out of place, but instead, thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure or greedy person, that is, an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for because of these things, the wrath of God is coming upon the disobedient. So do not be associated with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.

Luke 11: 14 – 28

At that time, He was driving out a demon [that was] mute, and when the demon had gone out, the mute person spoke and the crowds were amazed. Some of them said, “By the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he drives out demons.” Others, to test him, asked him for a sign from heaven. But he knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house. And if Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that it is by Beelzebul that I drive out demons. If I, then, drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own people drive them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that [I] drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man fully armed guards his palace, his possessions are safe. But when one stronger than he attacks and overcomes him, he takes away the armor on which he relied and distributes the spoils. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. “When an unclean spirit goes out of someone, it roams through arid regions searching for rest but, finding none, it says, ‘I shall return to my home from which I came.’ But upon returning, it finds it swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and brings back seven other spirits more wicked than itself who move in and dwell there, and the last condition of that person is worse than the first.” While he was speaking, a woman from the crowd called out and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.” He replied, “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”

An Arrow Towards Eternity

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In the book of Wisdom, we read: *“God formed us to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made us. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are allied with him experience it”* (Wisdom 2:23-24).

This is the most beautiful plan of God! God has created us to be imperishable. God created us in his image and likeness. There is a spark of the divine in each one of us. We were gifted with a spiritual soul that has the capacity to know and love what is true, good, and beautiful. The spiritual soul gives form to our bodies, and together, they constitute what we are: *“The Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”* (Gen 2:7).

However, the Book of Wisdom continues: *“By the envy of the devil, death entered the world.”* When we were created, a spiritual warfare had already been established. Beelzebul, the prince of demons, has already initiated a spiritual war against God and God’s creation. Then, our first parents became allies of the devil, and by wishing to be like God, they experienced death.

Now, let us not think that the enemy and accuser of humanity has stopped the destructive action. Let us remember the words of Peter: *“Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour,”* (1 Peter 5:8). Without ceasing and without rest, the enemy and accuser of humanity works for our eternal misery.

However, we are not alone. The apostle reminds us in the epistle of this Sunday’s liturgy: *“Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma.”* (Ephesians 5:2). The Son of God became flesh for our salvation. Then, Jesus died for us on the Cross to give us life and eternal happiness. As we read in the gospel of St John: *“I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance”* (John 10:10).

Let me share with you the story of a Saint.

Saint Alberto Hurtado was a Jesuit priest who lived in Chile at the beginning of the last Century. He died at the age of 51 in 1952 and was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

In 1946, Father Hurtado visited the United States, and he wrote after his journey: *“I just returned from the greatest country in the world.”* He saw the technological progress and the lifestyle by which *“death has been delayed and life prolonged.”* He also saw the tallest

buildings, the largest theatres, the subterranean tunnels crossing under the rivers, and the three, four, and more means of transportation.

Then, Father Hurtado returned from this splendid trip via cargo ship, nice and slow, the only passenger, with time to pray, think, and write, and he reflected, *“Is this all there is?”*

After that thought, Father Hurtado wrote this reflection:

Listen, son. Listen, daughter. It’s me. Who? Me, Jesus, Son of God. Jesus, true God. Me, the eternal God. I have come. I have journeyed, a very long journey. From the infinite to the finite, a journey so long it scandalizes the wise and rattles philosophers. From the infinite to the finite! The eternal to the temporal! God to the creature! Yes, that’s it! This journey is real. I have come. This is my journey!

For humanity. The only reason for this journey: humanity. That minuscule yet great creature! Because though small, humanity is great. The greatest creature in the universe! Greater than the stars! I have never made a journey for them, even less suffered for them! But for humanity, yes.

For humanity, but perhaps you do not understand me: I have come for you, for you! I do not love the masses, I love each person: each man, each woman.

I have come that you may have life. Life? What life are you talking about? Life, true life. The only life that can justify God’s journey is divine life: “That we might be called and be children of God” (1 John 3:1). We are called and truly are God’s children! The eternal God does not make such a journey except to give us a gift of great price: nothing less than God’s own divine life, participation in God’s nature given through grace.

Do we believe in this life? There are Catholics, like the one I met on my trip, who said to me, “Another life? No, Father, you’re joking.” There are Catholics who have never thought about this life. In fact, the majority are not even concerned about it. They ignore it. And yet this is the only true life. Whoever has this life, truly lives. Whoever does not possess it—though healthy, rich, wise and blessed with friends—is dead.

“What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26)

That is not all. Father Hurtado’s reflection is summarized with an image. He wrote: *“Before me, eternity. I am an arrow shot towards eternity.”* This is what we are: an arrow that has been shot towards eternity. We had a beginning, but there will be no end. After this life, eternal life begins.

If this is what we are, we must listen carefully to St Paul's words: *"Immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is fitting among holy ones, no obscenity or silly or suggestive talk, which is out of place, but instead, thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure or greedy person, that is, an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God,"* (Ephesians 5: 3-5).

If we are an arrow shot towards eternity, we should also agree with Saint Alberto Hurtado's conclusion of his journey: *"God wants to make me a saint! . . . This is the greatest thing in the world! Greater by far than the Empire State Building, than a Ford factory with a daily production of eight thousand automobiles. Of greater value for humanity than the discovery of atomic energy, a vaccine, or penicillin."*