



# LIGHT & LIFE

VOICE OF THE ROSARY CENTER & CONFRATERNITY

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Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P., Director Nov-Dec 2024, Vol 77, No 6 Western Dominican Province

## Remember Me

*The Semites of Bible times did not simply think truth—they experienced truth. As we have previously emphasized, truth is as much encounter as it is propositions. This experiential perspective on reality explains, in part, why Judaism never really developed vast systems of thought.... To the Jew, the deed was always more important than the creed. (Marvin R. Wilson, Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith, 1989).*

My mother is, and there is no other way to put it, growing more senile by the day. We don't know the root cause, and in a way, that is not important. What *is* important is that we spend time with her *now*. She still knows who I am, and what I do, but otherwise, she is usually in the dark about the specifics. She knows that I am somewhere on the West Coast. She usually mistakenly believes that I am working in a parish setting. She may call me several times the same week, unaware of the conversations we just had, and will always ask when I am coming to visit next. When I tell her, she will always ask for the current month and day, to place my coming into some kind of relative time concept - ah, I will be there next year, next month, next week, two days from now, and so forth. Often, we will have the exact same conversation four or five times within a short span, before she tells me she loves me, and wants me to pray for the family. This process may repeat a few times a week. For her, there is very little memory of what really happened, only that I was there at one point.

It occurred to me that this is not so different from fifty-some years ago, before I could form long-term memories as a child. I don't think I can place her in my memory before I was four or five years old, but I am aware that she was there. Even now, *she* has countless memories of me, encounters as a very young child firmly imprinted in her soul, that I can never and will never be able to recall. But it was as important for me that she *was* there, as it was for her the experience of how I bonded with her as mother and child. Who God is to us - this is as important a question, if not infinitely more so, as to who and what our mother is.

We may think of the old Jewish arguments in the New Testament as mere hair-splitting over tenets, but they were describing something very personal for them – a lived experience of the living God, of a God who broke into human history. As Our Lord intimates to Nicodemus in the Gospel of John, He was now making that relationship something even more personal and present (*cf* John 3).

St. John marvels at this, even from the prologues of his Gospel and his first letter. “I didn't just speak *about* God – I spoke *with* God – I was there in person, and so was He!” This does not mean that the creed is forgotten in place of the deed, for our Lord tells us, in no uncertain terms that, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15), and then, when we do not have Him in person, that He will send us the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

The Jewish and early Christian idea of remembrance, or of memory goes even further. Each memory, each participation in a past event, *is* to make present and at the same time participate in the past in a true encounter. When



IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, by Peter Paul Rubens

Our Lord tells us to “do this in memory of Me,” He is not asking us to flip through a photo album, or simply tell stories of what He means to us. He is asking us to encounter Him – ever ancient and ever new, in the same Sacrament, in that same Last Supper and Passion that echoes through eternity as the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## EARTHEN VESSELS

By Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P.

### Baltimore Catechism (edition 4):

7 Q. Of which must we take more care, our soul or our body? A. We must take more care of our soul than of our body.

8 Q. Why must we take more care of our soul than of our body? A. We must take more care of our soul than of our body, because in losing our soul we lose God and everlasting happiness.

The old saying, “Penny wise but pound foolish” refers to one who fights to find ways to save a few cents or dollars on one item, but is much more reckless when it comes to figuring out the overall cost. A practical example might be someone who decides to save a few dollars by not replacing the worn-out tires on his bicycle, but ends up in a wreck that costs him hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical care when he inevitably slips his bicycle on a wet patch of road.

Our Lord does not shy away from these comparisons, for they make the situation real, present, and personal for the listener. “For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?” (Mk 8:36). Ironically, Christ subverts this comparison by saying that the Kingdom of God is so precious that it is worth giving up *everything* for it, saying, “the kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant seeking good pearls. Who when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Mt 13:45-46). Everything that this world offers to us is worth so little in the final accounting, that to hold on so tightly to this world, we end up losing our passage into the next and better world by being “this world wise but eternity foolish.”

This is not to say that our health is *not* important. Our bodies *are* Temples of the Holy Spirit, and we should maintain them with the respect due to them. Yet no church building, no temple, no matter how glorious its art and history, compares in worth to the Eucharist locked in a small vessel within the church or temple. The Eucharist is, to the outside world, merely a small piece of bread. That Eucharist is, to *us*, a graced encounter and means to the next world. We will have Him, whom our hearts have desired beyond every human longing, there in person. Similarly, the image of God imprinted on a human soul is worth infinitely more than any passing outward appearance. All flesh will go the way of dust, but our souls are forever, whether we like it or not. We truly do hold treasures in earthen vessels as human creatures, with the opportunity to obtain Him whose image we bear for eternity.

This is why I so love this quote from St. John Henry Newman:

[The Church] holds that it were better for sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions who are upon it to die of starvation in extremest agony, so far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say, should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, though it harmed no one, or steal one poor farthing without excuse. (St. John Henry Newman, *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, Volume 1, Lecture 8)

This would have sounded shocking in Newman’s time – imagine it in ours now! Too often today we hear the term “treasures in earthen vessels” and exalt the earthen vessel above the priceless treasure within. If this is scandalous, imagine the audience in Our Lord’s day and age when He speaks about a “Good Shepherd” that leaves ninety-nine sheep in search of the one lost (*cf* Jn 10). When Our Lord speaks of God searching out for the sinner, He inverts the idea of *our* seeking the Kingdom of Heaven. In this world, we are the ones who should sell everything and look for the Pearl of Great Price, which is the Kingdom of Heaven. For God from the next world spares no expense in saving us poor mortals. God allows the sacrifice of His precious Only-Begotten Son, that we might be saved.

Now, the horror of sin *might* tempt us to inaction. If anything we say, do, or even *think* is so potentially horrific, who in her right mind would even bother getting out of bed? This is where the great mystery of free will comes in. God may allow an evil, but only to bring a greater good from it. He allowed the Crucifixion, but only to bring about our salvation. This is not to say that we should sin so that God can bring about good from it, but rather that God is so powerful that He *can* and *will* do so. As St. Paul teaches the Romans, “What shall we say, then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid” (Rm 6:1-2). In some way, Christ wants us to participate in His redemptive action, not that we can save others, but that we might be *instruments* in His salvific work of saving others. For us to cooperate, and not merely be robots, we *must* have free will. Love without free will is mere instinct or reflex. So love and good must accept the risk that there will be an imperfect or corrupted love, or even rejection.

Here is where some err in regards to Our Blessed Mother. She was perfect, morally speaking, but not perfect in so far as there was no possibility of change within her. She, like Eve, could *always* be tempted. But she, unlike Eve, stood steadfast against the soft, alluring and false whispers of evil, even from the very moment of her Immaculate Conception. Sin for her would be even more frightening, for she would fall from a much higher state than from the levels of our own wounded souls. At

the same time, even more strongly felt, since she would seem, to us, to be that much closer to God already and so might more easily be tempted to reach out and become like the Most High God. While she certainly meditated on all that God revealed and all that He did through her (cf Lk 2:19), she was also a *doer* of the Word. All of which leads us to our next question from the Baltimore Catechism:

9 Q. What must we do to save our souls? A. To save our souls, we must worship God by faith, hope, and charity; that is, we must believe in Him, hope in Him, and love Him with all our heart.

The idea of worship here goes beyond mere passivity. These days, we tend toward an exaggerated social activism to the detriment of the meditative or contemplative. Worship here implies a kind of true, active engagement with the Beloved, that is, God. Many saints loved the Song of Songs as a beautiful allegory of the soul seeking God and vice-versa: "In my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, and found him not. I will rise, and will go about the city: in the streets and the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, and I found him not" (Sg, 3:1-2).

The human will here is seeking God, and while it may seem to be an interior act, it is still more of an act than simply resting alone. There is nothing wrong with resting in God -- Our Lord, in fact, commands us to rest in Him (cf Mk 6:31), but love at its heart is *dynamic*. In Dante's *Inferno*, the adulterous lovers Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Maletesta are always in motion, strewn about by violent winds, never able to once again embrace. However, in the last sphere of Heaven in his *Paradiso*, (remember that Dante in this work struggled to truly capture Heaven, as he was still but a mortal), he sees God as He is, and in flash of insight and inspiration says, "But already my desire and my will were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed, by the Love which moves the sun and the other stars" (*Canto XXXIII*, 142-145, C. H. Stisson translation).

Dante, though he be praised by popes and saints alike, does not speak authoritatively, but he does express well something of this action. We will not simply be drawn into orbit passively, like a stray asteroid or rock captured by God's immense gravity. Rather, we will always be "falling" toward God, deeper and deeper into the infinite abyss of love that is God. The Book of Revelation, when coming to *the end*, speaks of a holy city, and His servants serving Him (cf Rev 22:3). Yet the service is that of worship, along with the angels and saints, truly loving Him with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength (cf Dt 6:4-9). Of course, it follows that we should also love our neighbor as ourselves.

Again, it is not solely in the meditative or contemplative, as important as that is, where most of us, according to our state of life and ability, would be saved, but in the active as well. St. James puts in no uncertain terms that, "So faith also, if it have not works, is dead in itself... For even as the body without the spirit is dead; so also faith without works is dead" (Jas 2:17;26). In the *Confiteor*, that is, the "I Confess" at the beginning of Mass, we confess of sinning, "in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in *what I have failed to do*". The wicked and slothful servant in the Gospels who did absolutely nothing with the talent that God had entrusted to him except hide it in

the dirt is not berated for his lack of faith, but for his lack of *action*, for not even daring to take some kind of risk. It is far better to fail in this world, but at least try, than to do nothing, with respect to our final reward.

### ACT OF FAITH

*O my God, I firmly believe that You are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe that Your divine Son became man and died for our sins and that He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the Holy Catholic Church teaches because You have revealed them who are eternal truth and wisdom, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. In this faith I intend to live and die. Amen.*

The traditional Act of Faith, even by its name, suggests that Faith, in one sense, is a human act. Here we must see Faith from both an *objective* and a *subjective* point of view. Objectively, Faith is based on God as its object. We must have Faith in *something* or *someone*; in this case, God. We have faith because the Faith is based on the one who can neither deceive nor be deceived, who is Truth itself. As we hear in one of the translations of the Eucharistic hymn *Adoro te devote*, "What God's Son has told me, take for truth I do; Truth himself speaks truly or there's nothing true." But even this objective Faith is not enough in itself. Faith, subjectively speaking, is still a grace; it is a pure gift from God. "Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act... In faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace: 'Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 154-155, citing St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II,2,9).

### ACT OF HOPE

*O Lord God, I hope by your grace for the pardon of all my sins and after life here to gain eternal happiness because you have promised it who are infinitely powerful, faithful, kind, and merciful. In this hope I intend to live and die. Amen.*

Hope is not so different from Faith in that both are theological virtues, that is, they both have their source in God. In the modern Catechism we read that, "Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit... The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1817-1818). I've often called Hope the "engine" of the theological virtues, faith, hope, and love. Faith is not sufficient in itself, in so far as the individual believing in the objective truth. "Thou believest that there is one God. Thou dost well: the devils also believe and tremble" (Jas 2:19). St. Paul adds that "For we are saved by hope" (Rom 8:24a), and the Spirit acts through us and in us

because of that hope. Hope thus *moves* us to act on our faith in love. We know, not just that God is, but we love God for who He is, and His love for us. We would not work for the Kingdom of God unless we had some hope in God and His goodness and mercy. St. Thomas Aquinas mentions that even animals work toward some possible good – birds make nests, for example, in the hope of rearing their fledglings and continuing their species (cf III Sent. D. 26, Q. 1, A. 1). How much more so it should be for the believer to attain the Kingdom!

### ACT OF LOVE

*O Lord God, I love You above all things and I love my neighbor for Your sake because You are the highest, infinite and perfect good, worthy of all my love. In this love I intend to live and die. Amen.*

The word “worship” originates from the Old English, “*worthscip*,” meaning that the object of our worship is worthy of respect, honor, adoration, or what we often call religious worship in current usage. Notice what the Act of Love and Scripture say: we are worthy of God’s love in ourselves, but God *is* worthy of our love. A Eucharistic Preface we use on Sundays in Ordinary Time (VII) sings that, “For you so loved the world that in your mercy you sent us the Redeemer... **so that you might love in us what you loved in your Son...**”

God is not simply love as an abstract -- He **IS** love and the source of all love, and anything that can be called “love” in this world shares or participates in God in some form, however imperfect. “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 Jn 4:16). We do not, however, accept the common modern refrain of our modern world that “love is love.” Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical on love, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is love), reminds us that, “Fundamentally, ‘love’ is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or other dimension may emerge more clearly. Yet when the two dimensions are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love. And we have also seen, synthetically, that biblical faith does not set up a parallel universe, or one opposed to that primordial human phenomenon which is love, but rather accepts the whole man; it intervenes in his search for love in order to purify it and to reveal new dimensions of it. This newness of biblical faith is shown chiefly in two elements which deserve to be highlighted: the image of God and the image of man” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 7).

### THE VIRGIN MARY AND LOVE

A selfish kind of self-love is natural. It may be as simple as self-preservation, or something more egotistical, a form of self-aggrandizement over what we actually are. As children, we often have to learn what love really is and its “other” dimension, not academically, but from our loved ones, especially our mothers and fathers. In the same encyclical mentioned above by Pope Benedict XVI, he closes with this final thought:

“The lives of the saints are not limited to their earthly biographies but also include their being and working in God after death. In the saints one thing becomes clear: those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them. In no one do we see this more clearly than in Mary. The words addressed by the crucified Lord to his disciple—to John and through him to all disciples of Jesus: ‘Behold, your mother!’ (Jn 19:27)—are fulfilled anew in every generation. Mary has truly become the Mother of

all believers. Men and women of every time and place have recourse to her motherly kindness and her virginal purity and grace; in all their needs and aspirations, their joys and sorrows, their moments of loneliness and their common endeavors. WE constantly experience the gift of her goodness and the unfailing love which she pours out from the depths of her heart. The testimonials of gratitude, offered to her from every continent and culture, are a recognition of that pure love which is not self-seeking but simply benevolent. The devotion of the faithful shows an infallible intuition of how such love is possible: it becomes so as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him; a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God’s love to become in their turn a fountain from which ‘flow rivers of living water’ (Jn 7:38). Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is and whence it draws its origin and its constantly renewed power” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 42).

Pray the Rosary, then, and let us together meditate on that valuable lesson of love and fidelity that Our Lady gives. Amen.

### (Continued from page 1)

God, in spite of being the Ancient of Days, invites us every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation (yes, not only Christmas and Easter) to come and visit specifically and in person. Too often, I think we have a transactional mindset that unless I “get” a measure of grace in the Sacrament, that somehow the Mass is not worth it. You may not always remember any specific Mass, but your Heavenly Father always remembers and is always looking to draw us into His cherished memory of us, of how He loves us even to the Cross, and to make that Sacrifice present in a way we can at least begin to grasp in the now. You were present to *Him* at the Last Supper and at Calvary, even though there’s no humanly possible way for you to remember something before you existed. He wants *you* present now, more than anything else, to make that love real for you in a lived encounter.

If you’ve been away, come. Why you were away is not as important as it is that you BE with Him now.



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Please continue to pray for our nine new novices, and for our all young student brothers in formation.

Our Lady of the Rosary and St. Dominic, pray for us!

Blessed be God!