



# LIGHT & LIFE

VOICE OF THE ROSARY CENTER & CONFRATERNITY

rosarycenter.org - (503)236-8393

Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P., Director Nov-Dec 2022, Vol 75, No 6 Western Dominican Province

## WAITING IN JOYFUL HOPE

by Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P.

It is as much a spiritual as it is a commercialistic sign of where our society is headed that even in the middle of September, before the first leaves on the trees begin to change color, that Halloween candy now makes its appearance on the store shelves... next to the Thanksgiving harvest symbols and pilgrims... and just down the shelf from Christmas decorations. Are people somehow celebrating all three holidays at once? Do folks sit down for candy corn-stuffed Thanksgiving turkey for Christmas dinner on Labor Day?

Perhaps it points to a fear, a "fear of missing out." This "fear of missing out" is a phrase that has even coined its own acronym, "FOMO." "Buy now, or you'll miss out!" "Hurry, hurry, this offer is only on for the next two minutes!" "CALL NOW!" But what is it that we think we are missing out on? Trinkets? Toys? Tasty treats? Is it *really* the end of the world if these pass us by?

Truly, we should be more afraid of missing out on living a holy life - like the saints we celebrate; or missing out on the heart of gratitude that Thanksgiving is about; or more importantly letting the profound love of Our Infant Savior pass us by; or the ultimate tragedy - missing out on eternal life!

While the fears of missing out on these more significant things are largely out of our control, (we can't purchase them or secure them with a phone call), we do have control over how we deal with and approach them. You may be thinking, "Most of us have no idea when the hour of our own death may come... and Our Lord *does* warn us that we know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of

Man will come, then isn't this a cause for fear?" Perhaps, but God Himself tells us throughout Scripture, "Be not afraid" and we have this consistent theme of persistence and perseverance interwoven throughout Scripture. If we always persevere, and are always ready, then it is impossible to be caught unprepared.

"Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom." This quote, most often misattributed to Thomas Jefferson, does contain a spiritual nugget of wisdom: if we want to live in the freedom of God as children of God, which St. Paul insists is possible in Christ, then we need to leave behind those things which are passing and which enslave us behind, and fix ourselves firmly upon the living God who changes not.

St. Paul is speaking in this context of sins of the flesh, or fleshly allurements (see the first part of Romans 8), but fear in itself can become an addictive and destructive drug all on its own, almost as much as the sins of the flesh, and so Paul focuses our attention to the antidote to fear (perfect love casts out fear) then transitions to "Destiny in Glory" and "God's Indomitable Love in Christ" of our future in glory as well as our reason for hope in Christ. St. Paul is not giving us a Pollyanna-esque view, for he writes, "We know that

all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8:22-23). He also tells us that these sufferings aren't worth comparing to the glory to be revealed in us. Yet, if we are not experiencing in this life the full effects of our redemption, we might be tempted to give up on Christ or doubt our ability to follow Christ.

(Continued on page 4)



IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Peter-Paul Rubens, 1629

### THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

Rosary Center

P. O. Box 3617, Portland, Oregon 97208

#### Subscription Rates:

|                       |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| United States .....   | \$12.00 Per Year |
| Canada & Mexico ..... | \$15.00 Per Year |
| Other Countries ..... | \$15.00 Per Year |

Novena of Masses in honor of

### THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

December 8th -16th

TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## The Paradox of Paradoxes

By Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P.

While we don't often describe it this way, by the time you read this, we will be entering the paradoxical season of Advent. Our Faith is built on what, to us mere mortals, are the most paradoxical of statements. Some unbelievers may say that such statements are proof that our Faith is irrational or untrue, but the paradox comes, not so much from God in Himself, but from our incapacity to capture the infinite goodness and being of God.

Now, paradoxes are not limited to philosophical or theological statements. The very word "paradox" merely meant a statement that might run contrary to expectation or common belief. Much of the humor that we use is based on this idea of paradox – that something is funny to us, because it's not what we expected, for example, Albert Einstein's quote that "The only thing that interferes with my learning is my education."

There are even "paradoxes" in medicine: for example, a paradoxical reaction to a stimulant that might act as a sedative or a depressant instead. We see this sometimes with hyperactive children, who, when given coffee or a drink with caffeine, might be calmed down instead of becoming agitated or even more active. We run into paradoxes in mathematics, physics, cosmology, chemistry, and so on. Sometimes, these paradoxes are "solved" when we have enough information, but even then, the result defies our expectations or common experience.

Paradoxes also came to mean something that would appear to be self-contradictory or illogical. The riddle of "Can God make a rock so heavy that He can't lift it?" is a common example of the Omnipotence Paradox that would appear to deny the idea of God's omnipotence at first glance, but this statement can be answered in several different ways, such as saying that it is a logical absurdity, so the statement is meaningless, or that in His omnipotence, God does not act contrary to His nature – God is logical and holds to His own laws, and is what He wills.

Some "paradoxes" are simply false, since they are based on falsehoods or false principles. Many of us can remember the famous Party slogan from the novel, *1984*, that "War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength." These obvious self-contradictory falsehoods can only be true when stretched to the most limited sense, that one cannot know what one is without the other, but the idea is to stretch and violate language to such an extent that the citizen is forced to abandon belief in anything but the Party. No one would use this in everyday speech today, although it does seem at times to play out in modern-day politics, such as the increasing intolerance of much of what calls itself "tolerance." So what are true examples of the use of paradox in our Faith?

The famous and beloved "Prayer of St. Francis" ends with a wonderful series of one paradox after another: "for it is in giving that one receives, it is in self-forgetting that one finds, it is in pardoning that one is pardoned, and it is in dying that one is born to eternal life." Even the beginning part of this prayer is a call to, in a sense, be the paradox, to bring love where one finds hatred, to bring pardon where one finds an offense, to bring truth where one finds error, and so forth.

The greatest paradox of the Prayer of St. Francis is perhaps that he never actually wrote it (being first published in a small French Catholic periodical in 1912, most likely by the publisher, a Fr. Esther Bouquerel). Those who know St. Francis and his works say that he never wrote or spoke in such a self-referential style (with a lot of "me" or "I"). A few years after it was first published, a French Franciscan friar would publish this prayer that St. Francis himself would never use, on the back of a holy card of St. Francis without it being attributed to the saint, but that led to this prayer being forever attached to the saint. Yet these paradoxical paradoxes lead us to understand *why* we use and have paradoxes in the way we understand and live out our Faith.

Yes, the statements are paradoxical, because they yield an unexpected or seemingly contrary result. How can one receive in giving? How can one find himself in losing himself? Is this not illogical, or at least unexpected? Quite so! Good Catholics who suffer from scrupulosity will sometimes come to me worried that their good deed was not perfectly altruistic. St. Augustine reflects on this beautifully dizzying reflection on the Trinity and love:

He therefore who loves men, ought to love them either because they are righteous, or that they may become righteous. For so also he ought to love himself, either because he is righteous, or that he may become righteous; for in this way he loves himself without any risk...

[W]hen we love love, we love one who loves something, and that on account of this very thing, that he does love something; therefore what does love love, that love itself also may be loved? For that is not love which loves nothing. But if it loves itself it must love something, that it may love itself as love. For as a word indicates something, and indicates also itself, but does not indicate itself to be a word, unless it indicates that it does indicate something; so love also loves indeed itself, but except it love itself as loving something, it loves itself not as love. What therefore does love love, except that which we love with love?

... Therefore he who does not love his brother whom he sees, how can he love God, whom on that account he does not see, because God is love, which he has not who does not love his brother? Neither let that further question disturb us, how much of love we ought to spend upon our brother, and how much upon God: incomparably more upon God than upon ourselves, but upon our brother as much as upon ourselves; and we love ourselves so much the more, the more we love God. Therefore we love God and our neighbor from one and the same love; but we love God for the sake of God, and ourselves and our neighbors for the sake of God.<sup>1</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas also reminds us that the heart of love is not in the feeling, but in willing the good of the other. Love, then, *is* other-regarding, yet in regarding others, it regards itself – love. And if you have love for your brother, then you must also love the love which *is* within you (which, though you may not realize it, is God or of God), although that love cannot be in you without loving God or someone else. And if you love yourself, then what *must* you want for yourself, as you would for any other person? The highest good, which is God, who is love. Returning to St. Augustine's discourse on love, then, if we "selfishly" want the goods of Heaven, then the best way to secure that greatest good of God and His Heaven is to regard God and others *first*. But in regarding God and others first, we are working for our own good or benefit.

Here we come to understand the purpose of paradox and parable: to open our minds ever wider to the possibilities that do not seem to be patently obvious to us and seem to go against our expectations and lived experience. Thus, Our Lord often spoke in paradox, trying to open the minds and hearts of His apostles and disciples.

When the argument broke out among the apostles as to who was the greatest, what does Our Lord tell them? "Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matthew 20:26b-27). The individual apostles wanted to rule, but in order to rule, they must serve, and if they want to ascend to a higher place, they must humble themselves, even unto becoming a slave. Paradoxically, then, the apostles would only really understand how to *live* the message of love, when Love and Life Himself died and was resurrected. Paradox went from a mental or teaching exercise to a new and utter reality for the apostles. They found joy, for example, at being "counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41b). St. Peter rejoiced in his apostolic poverty, realizing that he had acquired the one Treasure that needed to be shared, telling the crippled man, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, rise and walk."

Paradoxes *are* wonderful, but there can be a hidden danger in how we understand and live out the

Christian paradoxes, and that is in what is often called a "creative tension." Sometimes this can also be called a "both/and" mentality, as opposed to an "either/or." When one part of the paradoxical statement is lost, or out of balance with the other, then we will often find the whole structure collapsing.

One common creative tension is in "orthodoxy versus orthopraxis," that is, "right worship," with "right action." Some will act as if they are opposed, but really, with a good creative tension, with one "feeding" into the other, the whole Christian life is truly blessed. If we focus on orthodoxy to the detriment of orthopraxis, then our love collapses, because we have love of God, but not love of neighbor, and then, ironically, we lose sight of God. Here, we find ourselves ignoring the poor, for example. And Our Lord certainly had some words to say about *that*. But what happens if we focus on the poor, for example, to the detriment of God? Then we lose the source of love, God, and we become more philanthropists or administrators than Christians. We lose the very essence of what it means to be a Christian, and that is to be one who follows Christ. The world becomes a much darker and colder place without that light of Christ that Christians are called to give. To determine the right balance, wisdom, prudence, and discernment are needed, in harmony with our state of life.

Even in "pure" theology, these paradoxical professions of the Faith exist. Our Nicene Creed, which we proclaim every Sunday and Solemnity, begins with a simple enough statement: "I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible..." So far, this is something that others outside the Christian Faith might agree or assent to. And then, it is one series of unexpected, and to the world of the apostles, shocking statement after another.

"I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages..." These proclamations were what led some of the Jews in Our Lord's time to condemn Him for heresy, and they would be, *if* they were false. But they are true in the person of Jesus, and the only way that could be true is if Jesus were true God and true man, and fully God and fully man. Christian theology has tended to fall apart along these lines, which is one reason some have said that "All theology is Christology," which is a nice, shorthand way of saying that somehow all our theological problems and all our theological solutions both come from Jesus Christ.

The Athanasian Creed expounds on this theme:

"For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of substance of His mother, born in the world. Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood. Who, although He is God and man,

yet He is not two, but one Christ. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ..."

The errors that have historically crept into our understanding of Christ and His Incarnation, in my opinion, have led to a lessening of God, and the person of Jesus Christ, properly understood. If Jesus is not God and man, then God did not give us the greatest gift that He could ever give us: Himself. If Jesus is not God and man, then God did not love us so much that He would humble Himself infinitely below His godhood. If Jesus is not God and man, then the Most Holy Sacrifice of Christ is lessened to nothing more than a symbolic action. If Jesus is not God and man, then the chasm between God and man is beyond repair, and we will never be able to see God face-to-face and live. Heaven for us will be lessened. God will not be able to draw us ever closer to Himself.

And in the end, it robs the Christmas creche of its very power. Is that humble creche of the babe Jesus just a cute Hallmark moment? That's nice and all, but all babies are cute in their own way. There would be nothing special there for humanity as a whole, and certainly not for a world two thousand years removed from the event, if He were "just" another child.

Oh, no. It's not "just" another child. Is is THE Child, and it is every child, for Christ has taken all humanity unto Himself. As the Christmas carol sweetly wonders, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight." Yes, He is hope for the people in darkness, and He is fear for the powerful and proud.

He is the uncontainable God now contained in Human flesh. He is the Eternal Word of the Father, now an infant (literally, "one who cannot speak"). He is Omnipotence in vulnerability. He is the Eternal and invisible God robed in glory and majesty now in in the darkness, wrapped by swaddling cloths. And some people think that these Mysteries of the Rosary that we meditate upon are mere pious platitudes!

I think, thus that it would be fitting to close with a traditional Advent and Christmas Season Marian Hymn, losing ourselves in that wonder, in that ultimate paradox of the God-man.

*Loving mother of the Redeemer,  
gate of heaven, star of the sea,  
assist your people who have fallen  
yet strive to rise again,  
To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator,  
yet remained a virgin after as before,  
You who received Gabriel's joyful greeting,  
have pity on us poor sinners.*

### **Waiting in Joyful Hope** (Continued from page 1)

Well, the key to our solution is in that last phrase, "our ability to follow Christ." If we depend simply on our own abilities, we will *always* "miss out" on Christ. We do not call God, we do not buy *Him* off a shelf, no! God first called us. Our inabilities and failures can cause our hearts to falter. To counter this, we need that great remedy of the virtue of hope, perhaps the least valued of the theological virtues. Yet, St. Paul urges us, "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, *we wait with endurance.*" (Romans 8:24-25). And this hope also is not based on ourselves but in the God who is Love, whose own Spirit helps us in our weakness, who even "groans" (prays) for us!

This is why I think the season of Advent is important: It helps to build in us that virtue of hope in the midst of darkness and a changing world with all its uncertainty and to trust in the God who loves us; who became a little Baby to save us. When we are children, we wait in joyful hope for Christmas and the Christ Child, for that blessed day when we can hold the Babe of the manger in our arms (and of course, enjoy all our presents).

But as we grow up, I think we become more attuned with that "Second Coming" aspect of Advent. We held the Christ Child firmly in our arms as children. Now as adult believers, we see how much we need God to hold firmly to us as His children. When St. Paul reassures us with, "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?" (Romans 8:35), he is not negating that anguish or distress or persecution will happen to us in this world. Rather, he negates that they can cause us to "miss out" on God and instead affirms that in all these things we are "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

So let us be ready- watchful in hope, waiting in trust, but above all, faithful to the One who loves us.

---

### **NEW FROM THE ROSARY CENTER**

Fr. Lawrence Lew's photographs of sacred art inspire his contemplations of each Mystery of the Rosary. Beginning with a foreword by the Master of the Order, Fr. Gerard Francisco Timoner III, O.P., the words and images in this book make the Mysteries we contemplate vivid and real, helping all of us – those who pray the Rosary faithfully and those who struggle with the devotion – to pray with deeper reverence and greater understanding. 88 pages, full color art book. **Mysteries Made Visible** \$17.95

**Joseph's Donkey** is the heartwarming tale of a noble donkey purchased by St. Joseph shortly before his marriage to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The trusted creature helps Joseph in his carpentry business by hauling wood and stones, but he also plays a key role in all the major events recorded in the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels. Hardcover, \$16.95

---

<sup>1</sup> **On the Trinity**, St. Augustine, emphases mine.