



LIGHT & LIFE

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Fr. Peter Do, O.P., Director July-August 2021, Vol 74, No 4 Western Dominican Province

WHEN YOU PRAY...

by Fr. Peter Do, O.P.

For many Catholics, one of the difficult aspects of praying the Rosary is the repetitive nature of the devotion. It can be difficult to concentrate and stay focused on meditating the mysteries of the Rosary. Our Lord Jesus offers us a very practical and helpful recommendation: "when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret." (Mt. 6:6) In the context of this verse, Jesus was criticizing those "who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them." (Mt. 6:5) Yes, prayer is not about getting the attention of others, but about staying focused on God and meditating on the mysteries of God.

I can recall the first time praying the Rosary with my family as a child and remembering how difficult it was to stay focused. I kept on thinking about how long and boring it felt to pray the Rosary. It was not until the end of my sophomore year in high school that all changed. That summer, I was Confirmed and filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I went immediately afterwards to another city to a math and science camp. It was my first time away from home, and the longest time that I was away from home. I thought that I would experience home sickness. Fortunately, I met many others my age and formed a wonderful friendship with them. For the first time in my life that summer, I had a desire to pray and go to Church. I thought it was a strange feeling to be happy and excited to go to Church and to spend time praying. Before Confirmation, I would only go to Church and pray because that was what my family did together. It felt like a responsibility and a duty rather than a personal

desire on my part. After Confirmation, I began to have this urge to go pray for some reason. It was here for the first time in my life that I wanted to pray the Rosary by myself. I had prayed the Rosary with my family before, but never alone. What was strange about this experience was that I had a hard time finding a quiet place to pray. At this camp, it was always full of young people chatting, and finding a quiet spot to pray was difficult. I found that

the only quiet place to pray was in a janitor's closet. So that was where I spent my summer days praying the Rosary. This was my inner room, where I could close the door, and pray in secret.

I have since discovered that going to my inner room and to close the door was also to help me stay focused on God and the mysteries of God. We live in a world filled with distractions, like our smartphones, ipads, and social media. For those addicted to their smartphones, it can be difficult to not check for notifications every few minutes. The Rosary can be a great aid in freeing ourselves from these distractions. Once we are free of the need to check our phones, we can begin to pray without the distractions. The Rosary Center also has a popular booklet entitled "Praying the Rosary Without Distractions", to further assist those who struggle with staying

focused on the Mysteries. I myself use this booklet when I find my mind wandering off from meditating on the Mysteries of the Rosary.

As the interim director of the Rosary Center, it has been a privilege to hear miraculous stories from many people about how their prayers have been answered through Mother Mary's intercession. I would like to share with the

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The Assumption of the Virgin - Nicolas Poussin - 1630-1632

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

Ascension and Assumption, Cures for Depression

By Fr. Brian Mullady, O.P., S.T.D.

The Book of Job presents the problem case of the suffering of the just for our meditation. Job indeed is afflicted by every kind of physical and mental suffering and is so sad about it that he laments the day he was born: *“Let the day perish on which I was born; the night in which it was said ‘a man child is conceived.’ Let that day be darkness; may God not seek it, let it not be in recollection, nor light shine on it.”* (Jb. 3:3-4) Many Christian authors have been puzzled at how Job can say this and yet be described a patient and just man. This strong lament could express the perennial suffering and questioning of the whole human race even to the present day.

Covid has led many to experience deep depression bordering on despair because of the possible threat to life and physical isolation from loved ones. Pandemics can easily be fodder for the increase in human suffering especially the interior suffering which is caused by a perception that there is no order in the world, if even those who love God can experience such deprivations. Yet it is just such suffering that should lead to a deeper and more spiritual view of the world. Indeed, it is the very meditation on the loss of earthly goods which leads Job to the conclusion that ultimate happiness cannot be found in them or near them. Instead, he is inspired to find his hope in a spiritual future, the culmination of a life lived as a result of the redemption.

The intelligence of man then leads to the conclusion that there is no ultimate happiness on earth. Hope then is not in earthly goods, but in a new life resulting from the redemption which is the resurrection. Job first says: *“I know that my Redeemer lives.”* (19:25) and then continues as to what this means: *“and I shall arise on the very last day from the earth. I will encircle myself again with my skin and in my flesh I shall see God, whom I myself shall see and my eyes will behold him and not another. This my hope has been put in my heart.”* (19:25-27) Thomas Aquinas commenting on this text says: *“He (Job) not only held this hope in words, but hidden in his heart; not doubtfully, but most firmly; not like something of little consequence, but as something most precious. For what is hidden in the heart is possessed in a secret way, is firmly held, and is considered dear.”* (Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Literal Sense of the Book of Job, 19, 2, 2)

What is held as a secret hope of man in the heart bursts forth not only in the resurrection but is publicly manifested in the ascension and assumption. Why man here? What is the hope for man? Of what value is the human soul?

“Men of Galilee, why are standing you there looking up to heaven?” (Act 1:11) After his earthly mission and ascent into heaven, Jesus leaves the great commission with the Apostles: *“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they*

saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mt 28: 16-20) His work on earth is now complete.

His exaltation and glorification began with his resurrection, which was the opposite of his death. Now in response to his burial and his submission to wicked human judgment, he takes his place in heaven in his human nature. He sits “at the right hand of the Father” in his human nature because all judgment has been given to him. Just as he was judged unjustly, so now all judgment is committed to him to judge the entire creation justly.

From heaven, Christ beckons to us. When we contemplate his ascended body, we are invited to reflect on the final perfection of human nature. The body is made for the soul and the soul is created for God. Christ in a sense says: *“Behold the man.”* This is the answer to Pilate exhibiting him humiliated, mocked and scourged to the crowd saying: *“Behold the man.”* (*Ecce homo.*) When man sees God face to face, which is the direct knowledge of the divine essence without medium or concept, then human nature in its potential is fulfilled. In this very light of glory, the capstone and completion of the light of reason and faith concerning God then overflows into the resurrected and glorified body. Christ goes to heaven to “prepare a place for us.” (Jn. 14:3) Here one can see the practical fulfillment of the hope of Job.

From heaven, the Lord sends the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the Church at Pentecost. He also is not just present in heaven but by the Real Presence on the altar interceding for us and offering us a share in his life every time the Mass is offered. Contemplation of these mysteries is essential to keeping our pilgrimage going to the right destination. We need to keep our eyes fixed on the goal of our journey.

As Christ in his Ascension gives us both an example and the power to persevere toward our final perfection in both body and soul, so the Assumption of Mary shows us

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.

John 14:3

how this is accomplished in Christian life. The tradition of the Assumption comes from early Christian documents which maintain that Our Lady experienced a kind of death like a sleep which is not corrupting. The actual death of the Blessed Virgin is still an open question in the Church. But in John Damascene it is related that all the Apostles were transported to Jerusalem to keep vigil at the body of the incorrupt Virgin. Thomas of course was late and asked to see the body and when the tomb was opened there was no body and the Apostles rejoiced that Mary had received a special privilege as the first of believers to be taken in her body to heaven.

In this special privilege we see several reasons to increase our hope as believers. Jesus did not leave earth to leave us orphans but in order to complete his revelation on earth by the sending of the Holy Spirit into the Church. This includes all believers including us. The Holy Spirit is present in us if we are baptized and in the state of grace.

Also, one understands that in the woman *“clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars,”* (Rev. 12:1) one sees not only the realization of the movement of nature towards perfection but also the Church and what the final perfection of grace offers to us. Grace indeed perfects nature. All the panoply of creation from the tiniest microbe to the largest nebula have as their primary natural dynamism not matter and energy but the love of the Holy Spirit. Diversity comes forth from unity and moves to recover unity. But this unity can only be recovered in man and the soul in the state of grace. Our Lady was assumed into heaven and stands as a sign that all the movements of nature including the human will blessed by grace can only have the vision of God in heaven as their final purpose. Like Job, whatever we may lose materially on earth, whatever suffering may come our way, but as long as we do not sin we still maintain our dignity as human beings. This is specifically taught in the Ascension and Assumption where we see the fulfillment of our redeemer living in the resurrection, and revealed to Job in Christ and Mary. Mary is truly our life, our sweetness and our hope. She presents us to her Son. Both Jesus and Mary say: *“This is what your life means. This is what it is all about.”*

Thomas Aquinas expresses this in a much more intellectual way: *“...quite apparent in this conclusion is the fact that ultimate felicity is to be sought in nothing other than an operation of the intellect, since no desire carries on to such sublime heights as the desire to understand the truth. Indeed, all our desires for pleasure, or other things of this sort that are craved by men, can be satisfied with other things, but the aforementioned desire does not rest until it reaches God, the highest point of reference for, and the maker of, things. This is why Wisdom appropriately states: “I dwelt in the highest places, and my throne is in a pillar of a cloud” (Sirach 24:7). And Proverbs (9:3) says that Wisdom “by her maids invites to the tower.” Let those men be ashamed, then, who seek man’s felicity in the most inferior things, when it is so highly situated.”* (Summa contra Gentiles, III, 50, 9) In this he agrees with the beautiful

statement of Augustine in his Confessions: *“Unhappy is the one who does not know you, even if he knows everything else; happy is the one who knows you, even if he knows nothing else; the one who knows you and all the other things is any happier for knowing them than for knowing you also.”*

Aquinas defines salvation as “the enjoyment of God”. Who knew and enjoyed God better than his Mother. This sets up for the final triumph of Revelation where Scripture begins with the woman, the child and the serpent and ends with the woman the child and the dragon. Because the devil, the serpent and dragon, causes us to sin by suggestion he may be said in a certain sense to cause all sin. Over and above physical or mental depression, there is not only no enjoyment in the devil but all is rage and disharmony. He seeks to aggrandize himself off weak human souls. Mary gives the lie to all that nonsense. She never takes but always gives; she does not demand but always obeys. She does not manipulate but serves in love. *“She is the honor and glory of our race,”* as Wordsworth says: *“our tainted nature’s solitary boast.”*

All the same, contemplation on earth is not the most perfect way of life. The Church must share the fruits of contemplation with others. *“Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking up to heaven?”* (Acts 11:1) When Jesus ascended, he did not leave us orphans. Instead, he not only prepares a place for us, but will judge our place in heaven depending on how much we have imitated his life on earth by loving God on earth in the general judgement at the end of time. Mary is the first and most loving creation prepared to receive not only God in her soul but in her body. Both the ascended Lord and the assumed Mother should be beacons to us of what God has prepared for us. This is graphically described concerning both the just and the wicked in Matthew 25. The Liturgy of the Hours expresses these mysteries beautifully in the Magnificat antiphon: *“O Victor King, Lord of power and might, today you have ascended in glory above the heavens. Do not leave us orphans, but send us the Father’s promised gift, the Spirit of truth, Alleluia.”*

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WHEN YOU PRAY... (Continued from page 1)

readers one such story. Many years ago, a woman told me a story about her teenage son who dropped out of school, and ran away from home. He then got involved in gangs and drugs. Every once in a while, her son would appear and noticed that he had tattoos on his face, arms, and body. He also looked pale and emaciated, a sign that he might be on drugs. Distressed and worried about what might happen to him, she went searching for him and every time she saw him, would plead for him to return home. With sorrow and tears, she went to pray in front of the statue of Our Lady at the Grotto, every day for years, humbly beseeching the intercession of Mother Mary to bring her prodigal son back home. It was a humble prayer request: that he would return home. Her biggest fear was that her son would be murdered or that he would kill someone and go to prison for the rest of his life.

One day, while praying in front of the statue of Mary, she had a vision in which the statue came to life, and the Blessed Mother bent down to pick up a piece of rubble. Our Lady then handed it to the startled woman. Of course, this mother was in shock and slowly stretched out her hand. As soon as she received the rubble, the vision disappeared and all that she saw was the statue. Astonished and confused by the meaning of this vision, she shared this encounter with a religious sister who had a gift for the interpretation of dreams and visions. After hearing it, the wise sister said that the piece of rubble symbolized something which may seem worthless, but was very valuable, and so Our Lady wanted her to take it and hold it for safe keeping. However, the sister did not know specifically what the piece of rubble symbolized.

It was one year after that vision when this mother understood the meaning of the piece of rubble: it symbolized her son! Her son came home one day and asked if he might return home and go back to school. At last, her prayer request was answered. Her prodigal son finally returned home. He got rid of his tattoos and involvement in gangs. This young man went back to school to finish his GED at the local community college. From there, he went on for further studies and transferred to a local university and received his bachelor's degree. He later went on to medical school and graduated with his medical degree. Now, he is currently working as an anesthesiologist. It was through the persistent and patient

prayers of this mother and Mother Mary's intercession that God transformed this troubled young man from what seemed like a worthless piece of rubble into a precious gem. That piece of rubble symbolized this troubled young man. With God, all things are possible. This mother never dreamed that her wayward son would one day become a doctor. Her prayer was only that he be returned home.

God works in amazing ways, and invites us to be persistent in prayers and to never give up (cf. Luke 18:1-8).

This story reminds me of the story of St. Monica who spent years praying for her wayward son St. Augustine. It also reminds me of the parable of the prodigal son who asked his father for his inheritance. Of course, he squandered his inheritance and returned home. Despite all of this, his father ran out to embrace his son and welcomed him back home. Like the merciful father, we have a most merciful Mother who is always ready to help her children return to the Father's house. And like the merciful father, our Mother Mary gently helps to guide us back on the right direction: "*do whatever he tells you.*" (Jn. 2:5) The prodigal son recognized his waywardness and returned to the straight and narrow path. Each time we return to God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we are like the prodigal son who is given a second chance at changing the direction of our lives. I'm sure that many of our readers have stories to share of the miracles that have occurred in their lives

through the intercession of Mary. I invite you the readers to share your stories with us here at the Rosary Center.

On August 15, we will celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. On this feast day, it is appropriate to pray and meditate on the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary. It is interesting to note that we meditate both on the mystery of Christ's ascension into heaven and the mystery of Mary being assumed body and soul into heaven by God. This is an invitation for us to truly meditate on the things above. As St. Paul tells us: "*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*" (Colossians 3:1-4) May Mary, our Mother, help us to truly love and seek the things that are above, and to share with her one day the joy of seeing our Lord Jesus face to face.



Ascension of Christ - Cavalier d'Arpino - 1593-1595