

The Fruitful Spirit

Homily for October 12, 2022

Wednesday 28th week of Ordinary Time

Alexander the Great was one of the few men in history who seemed to deserve his descriptive title. He was energetic, versatile, and intelligent. Although hatred was not generally part of his nature, several times in his life he was tragically defeated by anger. The story is told of one of these occasions, when a dear friend of Alexander, a general in his army, became intoxicated and began to ridicule the emperor in front of his men. Blinded by anger and quick as lightning, Alexander snatched a spear from the hand of a soldier and hurled it at his friend. Although he had only intended to scare the drunken general, his aim was true and the spear took the life of his childhood friend.

Deep remorse followed his anger. Overcome with guilt, Alexander attempted to take his own life with the same spear, but he was stopped by his men. For days he lay sick, calling for his friend and chiding himself as a murderer.

Alexander the Great conquered many cities and vanquished many countries, but he had failed miserably to control his own spirit.

It is this theme that is at the heart of all today's readings. The Psalm recognizes there are two ways to live; the way of the fool whose end will be like chaff blowing in the wind; or the way of the wise whose end will be the way of prosperity. When thinking of prosperity do not think of this in financial terms but in spiritual and ethical terms.

Such a contrast is further highlighted by the Lord in today's Gospel. Here Jesus is able to challenge the hypocrisy of those with whom he was dining. While religious in their appearance and outward practice their hearts were far from the ways of the Lord. Jesus repeatedly chides them with words of challenge that speaks to the heart of the double standard that governed how they lived.

What both of these readings and the story of Alexander the Great highlight is that there is a war in the heart of each one of us. It is a struggle between the Spirit and our flesh, i.e., our fallen nature that inclines us toward evil (Rom 8:5–8). Unless we follow the Spirit's lead, the lusts of the flesh (concupiscence or disordered desire,) will dominate our lives and enslave us in sin. When we respond to grace, we enable the Spirit to work powerfully in us by clearing out the vices that lead us away from God. Because of our weaknesses, victory in this struggle is possible but not easy.¹

The sins of the flesh include more than just sins of the body (5:19–21). They consist of every act of immorality and injustice that stems from a disordered love of the world. These grave sins sever offenders from Christ (Gal 5:4) and will block their entrance into heaven if repentance is neglected.

¹ [*The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament*](#) (p. 340). (2010). Ignatius Press.

For think about it this way, if a person's life at the end is characterized by the works of the flesh, such a soul has become chaff, and what had become hell on earth will be realized in an eternal hell, cut off from God and love forever. This is why St Paul says that those who do such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God because this person has stifled the Spirit and submitted to the flesh

The indwelling of the Spirit produces holiness in the lives of believers. The first fruit of this divine presence is love, the source of all that is good and the virtue upon which others are built. It may be significant that Paul says "fruit" (singular) instead of "fruits" (plural), suggesting that life in the Spirit is integrated and whole, not fragmented or divided.²

When we reflect on the Fruit of the Spirit and pray for the grace for them to be realized in our lives we discover the forming of a soul that is living now with heaven already present, even though not yet fully realized. The Catechism describes the fruit of the Spirit as "charity in action". The Catechism goes on to say that the Spiritual fruit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory.³

May we take time today to prayerfully reflect on how the infusion of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives will help us to be fruitful and so emit the fragrance of heaven while still here on earth because our spirits are being increasingly governed by the Spirit of God.

² [The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament](#) (p. 340). (2010). Ignatius Press.

³ Catholic Church. (2000). [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) (2nd Ed., p. 451). United States Catholic Conference.