

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost
St Mary's Cathedral, Austin, Texas
17th November 2019

+ When people encounter a monk they sometimes don't know how to react: monks are "contemplatives" after all; they spend their days in the enclosure pondering spiritual things and in prayer. They can be perceived as 'first class' Christians, having left the world to follow Christ exclusively.

Much of that is true – or it should be (we monks, too, are not always what we ought to be). But permit me, as a monk, to say refine that perception a little. Monks are living nothing other than the Christian life, albeit (hopefully) with fewer distractions (good or bad) and with a greater intensity.

And on the basis of that, allow me to assert, then, that all Christians – every baptised person – is called to be a contemplative. To be sure the good, God-given and important variety of vocations we have do not permit everyone to spend as much time and energy on contemplating the things of God: the bills have to be paid; the work of teaching and preaching and witnessing to the Truth who is Christ in our post-Christian world is urgent. Whilst some particular vocations and certain times of life permit more contemplation, and that is all to the good, most do not.

Nevertheless, let me say it again: every Christian is called to contemplation. But how? When? Christian life in the family and in the world is rightly very busy.

The answer is: here, now, in the Sacred Liturgy, in this solemn Mass. This afternoon you and I are called by Almighty God to contemplation: to savour and to drink deeply of the riches that our Holy Mother, the Church, sets before us in her liturgical tradition, to nourish us and sustain us in the demands of our daily Christian life – whatever that may involve.

Amongst these riches we number the beauty of the ritual and chant – so optimal in a solemn Mass – and of course in its many prayers and readings. To begin to digest and ponder the meaning and implications of

any of these means that you are already on the road to contemplation. It is nothing more than that: internalising the power of the liturgical rites and texts (which are, of course, the singularly privileged means which Our Blessed Lord uses to act in His Church in our day) and of being open to their implications in the particular circumstances of our lives.

If we understand this, if we do this at least each week through Sunday Mass (though of course the Church's liturgical life offers us much more than this minimum), our rightfully different Christian lives and vocations will receive the strength and nourishment they need to be fruitful in this life and merit the reward of the next.

So, my brothers and sisters, from one contemplative to a lot of others, I challenge you, take something of this Mass and ponder it – be that the powerful cry of the Collect that we be absolved of our sins and freed from the bonds that they have created within us; the stark warning of St Paul in the Epistle that those “whose god is their stomach” are “enemies of the Cross of Christ,” or the magnificent faith of the woman in the Gospel suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years whose heart truly believed that “if I touch only His garment I shall be healed;” or even something as simple as the beauty of the incense rising before the altar today as a sweet offering of prayer in the sight of God.

The Sacred Liturgy is full of rites, chants and texts which can sustain a lifetime of contemplation – as any monk knows. That's why it's great to have a missal to help in exploring these treasures.

The important thing, my brothers and sisters, is that we *never* leave the Sacred Liturgy without taking at least something more to contemplate. And whatever it is that you take from the Church's Sacred Liturgy today, keep it in your heart and soul in the coming days and week. Recall it. Digest it a little more. Consider what, through the sacred reality you are contemplating, Almighty God asks of you in the actual circumstances of your life today.

My brothers and sisters, my fellow contemplatives, if we approach our celebrations of the Sacred Liturgy in this spirit, they will become the truly efficacious source and summit of our Christian life and mission in the world, to the glory of Almighty God and for the salvation of the world. +

Dom Alcuin Reid.