

**“To live in the body means to be exiled from the Lord.”**

***2 Cor 5:6***

We are taught by the world that everything in this life is good, and to satisfy ourselves with as many of this world's goods as possible. Shops and advertisers, on the high street and on-line, tell us that our lives will not be complete unless we possess this or have experienced that. Certainly, God has given us many good things in this life, and it is not wrong to enjoy His gifts so long as that enjoyment does not involve sin. But sooner or later we begin to discover that the delights of this world do not satisfy. When we have tasted one treat, we want the next one, and – by preference – it has to be even more thrilling than the last. In the end, we learn that the pleasures of this world turn to dust, and show themselves to be the mere distractions that they are.

But distractions from what?

‘To live in the body means to be exiled from the Lord,’ says St Paul in today's Second Reading. So long as we are on earth, we are away from home; away from the end, the goal, for which we were created for in the first place.

*Who made you? God made me.*

*Why did God make you? God made me to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this life, and to be happy with Him for ever in the next.*

So strongly does St Paul feel this – so ardently does he desire to be with Our Lord – that he ‘actually want[s] to be exiled from the body.’ He knows that until his soul is freed from his body – with all its failings, weaknesses, inclinations and temptations – he will never be truly happy. So long as he is possessed of a body, he will continue to be distracted from what truly matters, namely God and the things of God.

Not that the body is evil in itself. Most certainly not! We are not Manichees who believed that all material things were intrinsically evil. But we *do* believe that in our fallen human nature we still suffer the consequences of Adam's original sin, what we call the *four wounds* to our human nature: *ignorance* of the truth, goodness, and beauty of God; *malice*, whereby we think ill of others and sometimes do them harm; *weakness* in the face of temptation, and in the face of threats to a life of virtue; and *concupiscence*, an automatic leaning towards the comforts, pleasures, and conveniences of this world.

And so long as we suffer these four wounds of ignorance, malice, weakness, and concupiscence, we are more inclined to please ourselves instead of being, as St Paul says, 'intent on pleasing [Our Lord].' And so long as *this* is the case, then we are living in exile from the Lord.

The other two readings today – the First Reading from Ezekiel and the Gospel passage – paint pictures of verdant pastures, of life and growth, of fruitfulness, and of plenty. Even in this life such abundance can be ours if we live according to the Commandments and precepts of Almighty God, and place our trust more in Him than in our own inclinations and self-centered desires. This is not to say that God promises freedom from trials and tribulations. Difficulties, and even pain, will always be with us. Even so, if our main focus in life is on God and the things of heaven – rather than on the things of earth – then we can, perhaps, attain to an interior peace which will help us to maintain a sort of spiritual equilibrium even in the face of adversity.

And how do we do this?

Chiefly, through prayer, and by establishing a daily routine of prayer so that the grace poured into our souls in the Sacraments can be nurtured and strengthened over time; through frequent aspirations along the course of each day – continual reminders of God, darts of love fired up to God – many times during the day however busy we may be; through a

pruning away of some of the delights of this world, even the morally neutral pleasures, until we are used to saying ‘No’ to self and ‘Yes’ to God; by simply refusing to go along with the ideologies and follies of our society, and by refusing to bow to the demands of a world that has lost its way.

Turn off the television, the social-media platforms, and even your internet connection except when functionally necessary. Turn away from the screen, and turn towards the beauty of God instead. Allow your soul to inhale – to breathe in – the fragrance of the cedar tree and the ripe harvest. Let your soul be planted in ‘the house of the Lord [so that you can] flourish in the courts of our God, [and] still bear[.] fruit when [you] are old, [and] still [be] full of sap, still green.’

It is not accidental that the Church chooses green as Her liturgical colour throughout the remainder of the year now that the cycle of redemption is completed. The Church holds up before our eyes the verdant freshness of growth that comes with being planted in the Lord.

‘Taste and see that the Lord is sweet,’ cries another psalm (Ps 33:9). But it is only by exiling ourselves from the saccharine sweetness of this world’s delights that we can hope to savour the more subtle freshness of God Himself.

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