



MARCH
2022

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Sunday at Sea with Fr Pio Idowu

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT
SUNDAY 6TH MARCH

GOSPEL LUKE 4:1-13

At that time,

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil.

And he ate nothing in those days;

and when they were ended, he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours."

And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"

And he took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

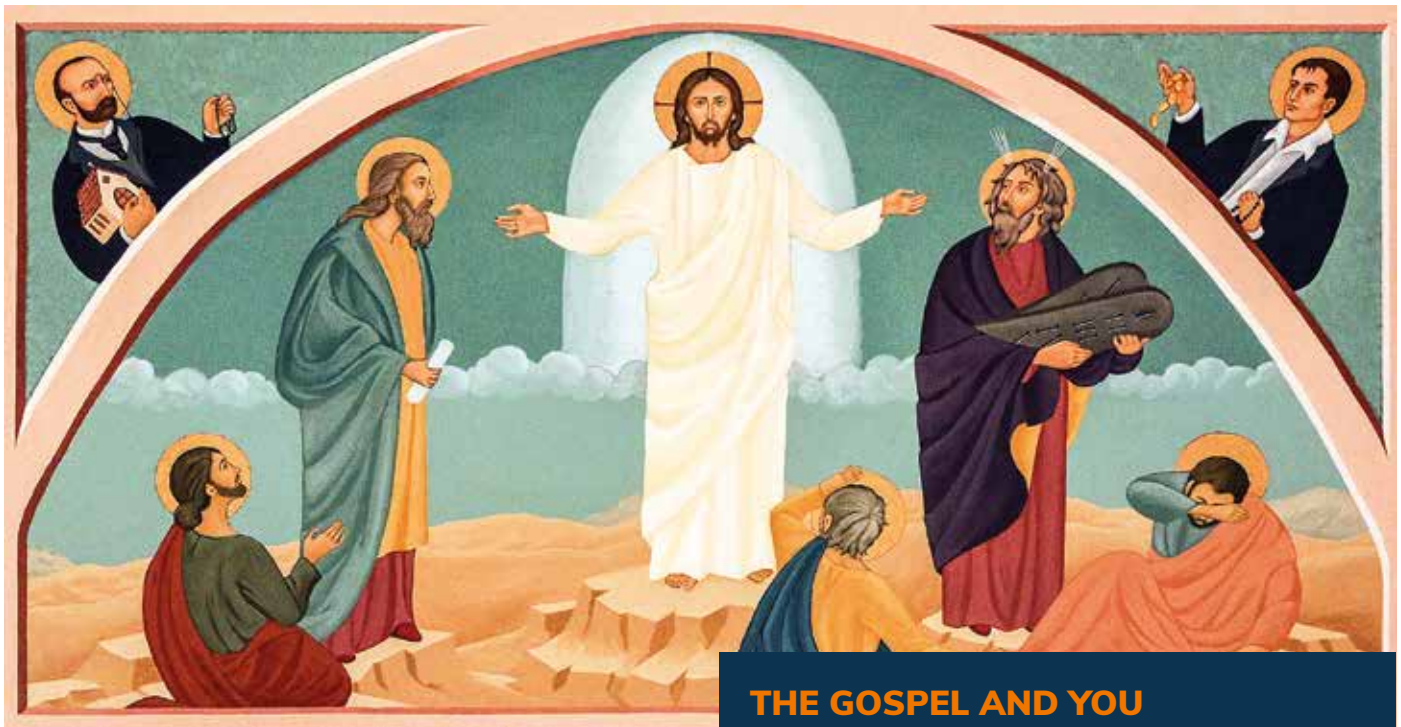
THE GOSPEL AND YOU

One of the very first things we should grasp in the spiritual life is the understanding of the nature of temptations and the best way successfully to counter them. In themselves, temptations are not sins. A temptation is simply an invitation to commit evil. This invitation comes from our spiritual enemy who is the devil. God does not tempt anyone directly, but He allows us to be tempted so that we can merit heaven, purify our souls and make progress in the spiritual life. We shouldn't consider temptations as something evil but instead as a wonderful opportunity to prove how much we love God.

Another thing about temptations is that they are a sign of God's predilection. The devil tempts those who persevere in God's grace. When God permits the devil to tempt us, He wants to make us more conformed to His Son who was tempted in the desert and yet did not sin. That is the example we have to imitate when we are tried by temptations. We need to be courageous and stand up to the devil.

When tempted, we put the devil to flight by having recourse to prayer and to the Word of God. Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days to teach us that only by doing violence to ourselves can we hope to overcome the devil. Jesus had recourse to the Word of God when He was tempted, and He shamed the devil. Christ is the Word of God, and we receive Him in the Holy Eucharist. When you find yourself in temptation, do not stay away from Christ in the Holy Eucharist but run to him asking Him to help you.

Our prayer will be more effective when we seek the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The devil fears her and trembles in her presence. When tempted to commit sin, when tempted to do, think or say something evil, let your thoughts turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary pleading that you will never have the misfortune of offending God.



SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT
SUNDAY 13TH MARCH

GOSPEL LUKE 9:28b-36

At that time:
 Jesus took with him Peter and John and James,
 and went up on the mountain to pray.
 And as he was praying,
 the appearance of his countenance was altered,
 and his clothing became dazzling white.
 And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and
 Elijah,
 who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus,
 which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.
 Now Peter and those who were with him
 were heavy with sleep but kept awake,
 and they saw his glory and the two men who stood
 with him.
 And as the men were parting from him,
 Peter said to Jesus,
 "Master, it is well that we are here;
 let us make three booths,
 one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—
 not knowing what he said.
 As he said this,
 a cloud came and overshadowed them;
 and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.
 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying,
 "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"
 And when the voice had spoken,
 Jesus was found alone.
 And they kept silence and told no one in those days
 anything of what they had seen.

THE GOSPEL AND YOU

Last Sunday, reflecting on the temptations of Christ in the desert, we were made to understand that in order to gain the crown of everlasting glory we must enter into battle with the enemy the devil and overcome him. The devil will not leave us alone and will always continue to trouble us. But if we persevere, if we stand up to the devil fortified by God's grace, and defeat him, ours will be a crown of glory which awaits us in heaven. In today's Gospel, Peter, James and John saw a vision of that glory that awaits us when, on Mount Tabor, Jesus manifested to them the full splendour of His divine glory. Peter, overjoyed by the vision, could not contain himself but exclaimed: "Master, it is good that we are here." St Alphonsus de Liguori says that "The glory of heaven consists in seeing and loving God face to face." And we experience a bit of that glory each time we pray with great fervour and devotion. Prayer is that moment when we isolate ourselves from the distractions of this world and withdraw ourselves into God's presence. In prayer, we contemplate the face of Jesus and we begin to experience a bit of that glory which awaits us in heaven.

Lent is a special time during which we Christians are reminded that God has called us to greater things. Following the example of Christ, we are encouraged to go into the desert with Christ, to climb up the mountain into God's presence. And the Lenten observance should not be limited to these forty days. Lent extends to all of our earthly life, because, as St Paul says in the Epistle, God has not called us to uncleanness, but unto sanctification. Hopefully, the good resolutions you have made this Lent will remain even after. We hope that when we this Easter come to behold the glory of the Risen Christ, we will be filled with a longing and desire to behold His glory forever in heaven.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

SUNDAY 20TH MARCH

GOSPEL LUKE 13:1-9

There were some present at that very time who told Jesus of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them,

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus?

I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell

and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem?

I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

And he told this parable: A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.

And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Behold, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none.

Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?’

“And he answered him, ‘Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”



“Father, I have sinned against you and I do not deserve to be called your child”.

THE GOSPEL AND YOU

In today’s Gospel, Jesus emphasizes the need for repentance. Some of those close to Jesus told Him how Pilate had massacred a group of Galilean pilgrims, mingling their blood with their sacrifices. We are not told why Pilate committed such a gruesome act of brutality. But Jesus uses the opportunity to help His listeners understand that unless they repent, a far more terrible death awaits them: “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”.

Tragedies happen and they will always happen. Unfortunately, life on earth is like that. We will all die a mortal death one day. For some it will be terrible, for others it will be a peaceful passing away. Why the difference? Only God knows. But when we accuse God of the evils in this world, we miss the point. God does not want evil but sometimes He permits evil for specific reasons. And one of these specific reasons

we learn in today’s Gospel. Temporal tragedies do exist and sometimes there is nothing we can do about them. But we should all be aware of the eternal tragedy that could befall us if we do not repent.

Twice Jesus makes this statement: “...but unless you repent you will all likewise perish”. With these words, Jesus warns us against having false self-assurances. Let us avoid deceiving ourselves and trusting in our own judgements. Instead, let us be humble and acknowledge that without God’s grace, we have no hope of survival. During this period of Lent, we are encouraged to go to Confession and humble ourselves before our heavenly Father. There in Confession, we can tell God in all humility: “Father, I have sinned against you and I do not deserve to be called your child”. And we can be assured that God will not remain unmoved but will surely bless us.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

SUNDAY 27TH MARCH

GOSPEL LUKE 15:1-3,11-32

At that time:

The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.'

And he divided his living between them.

Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living.

And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want.

So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine.

And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger!

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

"And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'

And they began to make merry.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.'

"But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Behold, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!'

"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"



THE GOSPEL AND YOU

The parable of the prodigal son reveals to us the boundless mercy of God our Father. A man had two sons, the younger of whom demanded his share of inheritance which he then proceeded to squander in reckless living. The title of the parable may be a little misleading as it seems to focus on the wayward actions of the younger of the two sons and his eventual repentance. But then, the parable actually wants to draw our attention to the father, who was as prodigal in loving just as the son was in spending. What the parable seeks to reveal to us is that the love and mercy of God knows no limits. In spite of all our pride and ungratefulness toward Him, God will always remain true to Himself who is full of love and mercy.

The younger son was insensitive to his father's love and did not even wish to wait the death of his father before demanding his share of the inheritance. Then he goes off to waste all that property. After wasting everything he had, a severe famine arose in the land where he dwelt and in order to survive, he hired himself out to a stranger who sent him to the field to feed pigs. He was so destitute and with nothing that he even desired to eat the pods that the pigs ate. For a Jew, this was a great humiliation, but it also helps us understand the sad state of misery into which a sinner descends when he strays from the will of God.

But just as the father in the parable every day waited the return of his son, so also does God our Father in heaven await with joy the sinner who repents. This parable encourages us not to lose hope and confidence in the mercy of God. God wishes that all will come to know of His infinite mercy and have recourse to it in their every need. No matter how terrible our sins may be, if we truly repent of them, God will forgive us.

Unlikely Saints!

> The Opium Addict

St Mark Ji Tiangjing was in many ways an exemplary Catholic. As the doctor for his village and as a husband, father and grandfather, he was completely serious about living his faith.

But Mark had one big problem: during a bout of painful illness in early middle age, he self-medicated with opium. Mark's illness got better, but he soon realised he'd become dependent on the highly addictive drug he'd used to treat himself.

Mark's local priest had a hard time understanding. Not grasping the complexities of addiction, he reasoned that if his penitent kept confessing the same sin every time, he must not really want to change.

Mark was told not to come back to confession, nor to receive the Eucharist, until he returned to a respectable way of life.

For the next thirty years Mark's life was a solitary battle. He never kicked the addiction for all his prayer and all his effort, but his refusal to give up was preparing him for something greater.

In 1899 an anti-Western rebellion swept through China, and Chinese Christians were its primary targets. Mark was taken by the rebels along with his entire family. "Where are we going, Grandpa", his grandson asked him. Mark replied: "We're going home."

St Mark Ji Tiangjing is one of many Chinese martyrs, but his unique story helps us understand St Paul's maxim: "it is when I am weak that I am strong."

St Paul had pleaded with God to take away his 'thorn in the flesh', but had received the answer in prayer: "My grace is enough for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness" (Corinthians 12:7-10).

St Mark is a sign for all of us who suffer with a



weakness we fear we may never overcome, that God can make us prayerfully dependent on him, not in spite of, but through those weaknesses.

“My grace is enough for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness”

➤ The Unfaithful Priest

There's no getting around it: a Catholic Priest who doesn't hold fast to his vows is a disaster. Not only is he failing to live his vocation, he also weakens the faith of those around him. He's a sign of the corruption and scandal that the Church has always been plagued by.

So **St Andreas Wouters**, a deeply compromised priest in the sixteenth century Netherlands, is never going to be the subject of a long and edifying biography. Known to everyone as a drinker and womaniser, he was under suspension from his office when a group of extremist Protestants captured his hometown in 1572.

They'd already rounded up eleven Franciscans from a nearby friary and several other local priests (including one saintly Dominican who'd rushed into the town to try and help them).

Imprisoned in a barn with his brother priests and tortured, something changed for Andreas. When he was offered the chance to save himself by denying the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the weakness of his

past life was transformed into the heroic virtue of perseverance.

Reconciled to the Church, he was hanged with the other captives shortly afterwards. Mocked by his murderers, he calmly replied "A fornicator, I was. A heretic, never."

St Andreas is a reminder for us that it's never too late – and the mess is never too big – to start again: as long as there's a single hour left to work in the Vineyard, the labourers can still earn their wages.



➤ The Village Hellraiser

Blessed Franz Jägerstätter was a husband, father and farmer who chose to be beheaded by the Nazis rather than join their army: the only person in his rural Austrian village who was willing to stand up to them.



That outstanding Christian witness, however, would not have seemed likely to anyone who knew him in his youth.

Franz owned a motorcycle, liked getting drunk and getting into fights, and fathered at least one child out of wedlock. You know the type. The son of unmarried parents himself, he'd been raised by his mother and step-father

after his own father was killed in the First World War.

Things began to change when he met Franziska Schwaninger. The couple married when he was 29, and after she dragged him to Rome for a pilgrimage-honeymoon, Franz began to attend Mass daily and even to give alms, despite being a poor man himself.

Franz managed to defer his conscription to the German army four times, but in 1943 he was arrested for refusing to serve.

His parish priest and numerous others tried to persuade him to join, but he was sure he could not. Only his wife stood by him, agreeing that Nazi ideology was completely

contrary to the Christian faith and could not be co-operated with.

Many argued that someone of his social standing didn't need to worry about this kind of question, if educated bishops and politicians were willing to go along with it. Others that his first duty was to his wife and children.

Franz held firm, saying that he had no right to take the lives of other husbands and fathers simply to protect his own. He was tried by a military court and executed shortly afterwards, at the age of 36.

The parallels between Blessed Franz and another martyr of conscience, Thomas More, are as striking as the differences between them.

Taken together, perhaps they show us that the external circumstances of our lives: background, education, even our past sins, are not quite as important as we might think they are. What really matters is how we respond in the hour that God calls us to be his witnesses.

That outstanding Christian witness, however, would not have seemed likely to anyone who knew him in his youth.

The Three Weapons of Lent – Fasting, Almsgiving and Prayer

By Fr Vivian Boland OP



LENT

fast pray give

The threefold asceticism of Lent, which is the threefold Christian life at any time, consists of giving, prayer and fasting (Mt 6:1-18).

Fasting

Over indulgence in food and drink is always possible and it is often easier to find excuses for it than to recognise it simply as temptation. If we give ourselves over to the culture of blaming and litigation, of complaining and standing on one's rights, we run the risk of losing a sense of being blessed, the awareness of creation as a gift from a gracious God. A proper appreciation of the good things of the earth must include recognising where they come from, discerning how they are to be wisely used and remembering that there are other people in this world whose basic needs (food, water, shelter) are not being met while we are satisfying imaginary needs. Fasting cannot be simply a personal challenge to see if we can meet certain spiritual targets, a visit to a kind of spiritual gymnasium. Modesty in our intake of food and drink, and even abstinence from them, supports concentration and meditation, reminds us of the needs of others, and helps us to acknowledge the gifts of God.

John Paul II reminded consecrated religious of their need to rediscover the ascetical practices typical of the spiritual tradition of the Church. These are powerful aids to authentic progress in holiness, he said, helping to master and correct the inclinations of human nature wounded by sin, indispensable if we are to remain faithful and follow the way of the cross (*Vita Consecrata* §38).

Almsgiving

When Jesus speaks of almsgiving he warns against doing it in a way that draws attention to ourselves. The temptation of what is delightful to the eyes is not just about physical beauty that might arouse our lust but about how we want to appear to others, how we wish to be seen. It is about power and autonomy, being influential and recognisable, being in a position to help others and make them indebted to us. There are great dangers here and the virtues we need to resist them are

those associated with justice: gratitude, respect, humility, truthfulness, generosity, as well as justice itself. We give alms to others not only by giving them a handout but also by respecting their property, by honouring their good name and reputation, by seeking to be honest in regard to their gifts and failings (as well as our own). In a world obsessed with fame and celebrity, with how people seem rather than how they are, there is more need than ever for followers of Jesus to be humble, comparing themselves only with God and thereby recognising their nothingness as well as their greatness.

The desire to count for something, to find one's place in the sun, even to have authority over others, can be as powerful as the desire for food or drink or sex. Who can survive being praised, the Book of Proverbs wonders (27:21). Who can stand up to riches, the Book of Sirach asks (31:10; see 1 Tm 6:10). There is nothing to be done except to engage in the combat these desires force on us. We must get involved in this combat if we are to remain directed towards our goal, if we are to continue to grow in the life Jesus gives us.

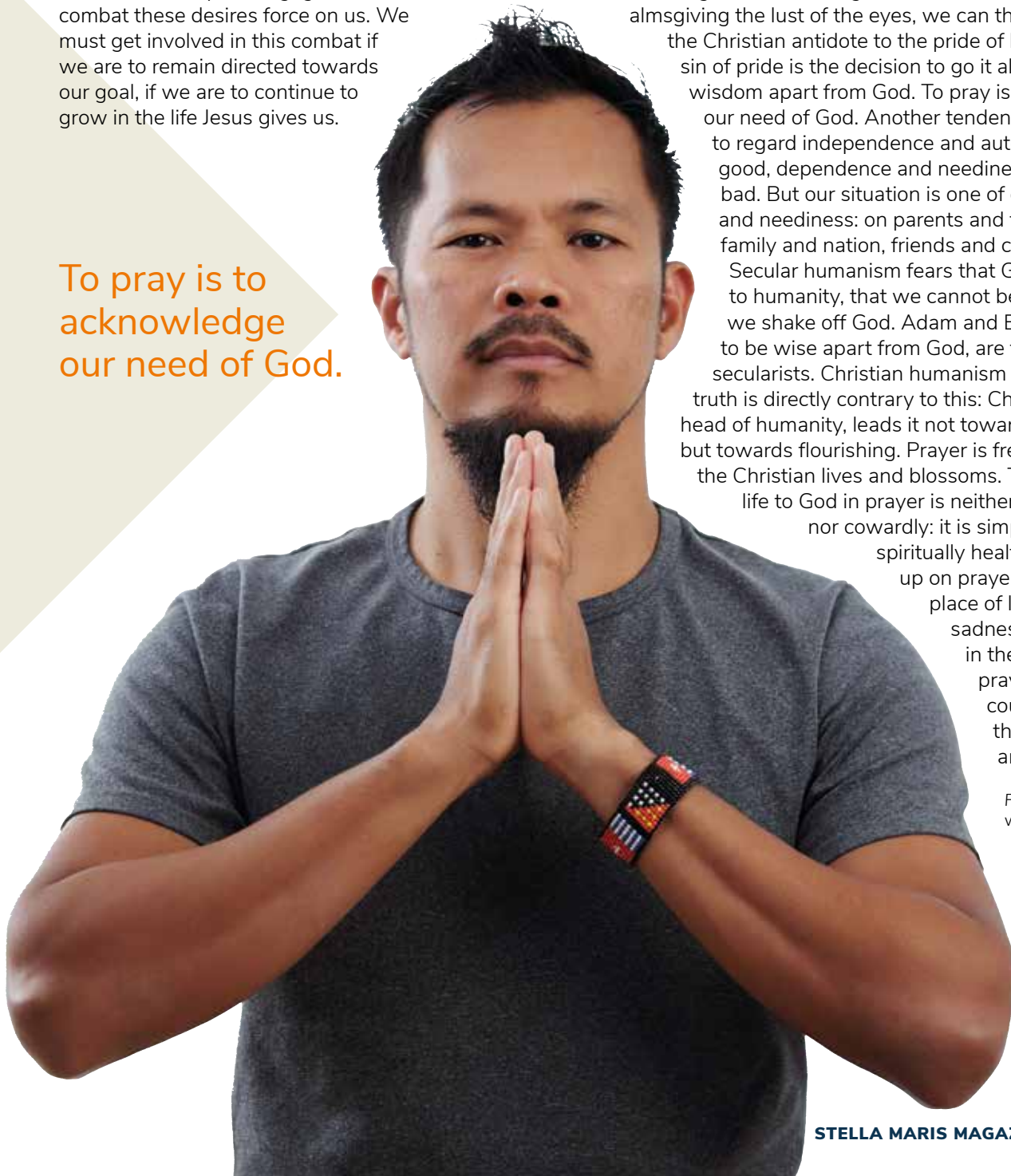
To pray is to acknowledge our need of God.

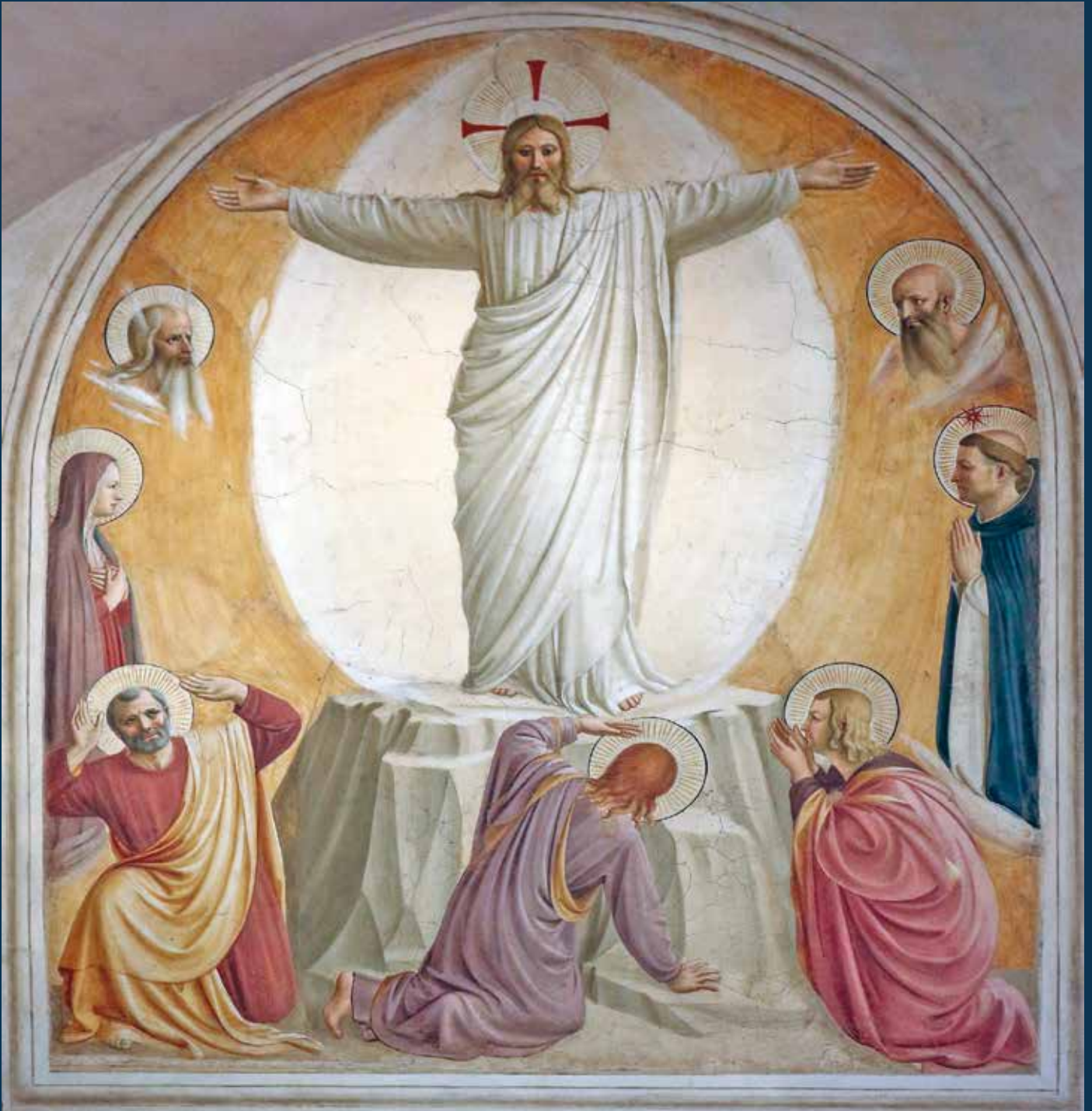


Prayer

If fasting seeks to manage the lust of the flesh and almsgiving the lust of the eyes, we can think of prayer as the Christian antidote to the pride of life. The original sin of pride is the decision to go it alone and to seek wisdom apart from God. To pray is to acknowledge our need of God. Another tendency of our time is to regard independence and autonomy as simply good, dependence and neediness as simply bad. But our situation is one of dependence and neediness: on parents and teachers, family and nation, friends and colleagues. Secular humanism fears that God is a threat to humanity, that we cannot be truly free until we shake off God. Adam and Eve, in seeking to be wise apart from God, are the original secularists. Christian humanism knows that the truth is directly contrary to this: Christ, who is the head of humanity, leads it not towards destruction but towards flourishing. Prayer is fresh air in which the Christian lives and blossoms. To submit our life to God in prayer is neither humiliating nor cowardly: it is simply truthful and spiritually healthy. To give up on prayer is to enter a place of loneliness and sadness. To persevere in the struggle of prayer requires courage but is the way saints are made.

From the booklet Spiritual warfare courtesy of the Catholic Truth Society.





A LENTEN PRAYER

O LORD, who for our sake fasted for forty days and forty nights: give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey your commands in righteousness and true holiness, to your honour and glory. Amen.



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