

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*

*“What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him lower than the angels, to crown him with glory and worship.”*

These are the words of King David. They are the words of a man who has thought long and hard about the reality of his own existence. Have you, like King David, ever wondered about what it means to be human? Have you ever thought about what you are...about who you are...about whose you are?

It is made plain to us by the very world around us that there is a Creator and that we ourselves are numbered among His creatures. “When [we, like King David,] consider [the Lord’s] heavens, even the works of [His] Fingers; the moon and the stars which [the Lord] hast ordained...” we cannot help but ask the question: What is man? And, why, O God, are you mindful of him?

Inside each of us is a heart longing for life...a burning desire *to live, to be, to exist*. However, there is also a haunting anxiety that has been growing within us since we first realized that we ourselves shall one day die. Even though we long to live forever, we know that death is coming for us. So, is the life of man but vanity and anguish? Did God give us life, only to watch us die?

We are not alone as we face these questions and neither was King David. Hear these words of the Preacher whose words are recorded in the book of Ecclesiastes. Asking for himself the question, “What is Man?” the author comes to the conclusion that man is but a mere mortal creature. He says, “...that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all *is* vanity.”

What are we to make of this? Is man nothing more than a beast? Are we all just living to die?

Although the Preacher of Ecclesiastes is correct in his conclusion that man is himself an animal, that is to say, man is a mortal creature that has a soul, his conclusion that all is vanity is inaccurate.

His belief that all is vanity flows out of the wound of his corrupted nature...he speaks from his own painful experience. His heart, which longs for eternal life, aches as it beats like the drum of a solemn march towards his own death. It is this pain that blinds him and causes him to conclude that surely all is vanity. But is this the destiny of man? Were we created to simply live today and die tomorrow? Is there any hope for us mortal creatures?

Saint Paul, in today’s Epistle, speaks to these questions. As he writes unto the Christians of Rome, he addresses the problem of death. There, he explains to the Romans that “...the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.”

According to Christian Faith, man was not created so that he could die. He was created to participate in the eternal life of God. In his work, titled, *On the Incarnation*, Saint Athanasius affirms his belief in the deathless destiny that man was to inherit. He writes, “To man, however, a special grace was given beyond that of mere existence—that of being made after God’s Own Image. This grace was strengthened by placing him in Paradise, and giving him a law. Obedience to the law would ensure continuance in blessedness, and man would finally, by a deathless change, pass into the heavenly life.”

In the beginning, Adam and Eve were given the gift of eternal life, but they traded that gift for the wages of sin. Man was created with God as his master, but instead chose to serve another master; he yielded his members to iniquity and thus, Adam and his offspring became enslaved to sin.

According to Paul, everyone born into this world is born as a slave to sin. Each of us, from the moment of our very conception, is under bondage to sin and, thus, born to die. This is why our Lord has taught us that unless we are born anew through the Sacrament of Baptism, we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. We must be regenerated...we must be recreated...we must be made into a new creation, into a man who is mortal by nature, but, by grace, a participant in the Divine Life.

The Good News of the Gospel is this: that although it is true that we all must die, Jesus has gone before us in death, trampling down death by death and turning death into the entrance way of eternal life. Because Jesus took our humanity up into the Godhead, man is no longer bound to serve the master of sin. We can be set free.

Jesus has bought us with the price of His very own blood. And, as Paul says in another Epistle, we are not our own. God is once again our master, and we have been freed to serve Him...we can once again yield our members unto righteousness.

Because God is once again our master, we are free to yield our members unto righteousness and we are able to have our fruit unto holiness. Because we have died with Jesus in His Baptism, we have been born anew. In Christ, man is now higher than the angels and crowned with glory and worship. Manhood is now seated at the Right Hand of the Father.

If this is the case, however, you may be wondering, why do we still sin? If we, as baptized Christians are now free to serve righteousness, why do we still yield our members to iniquity? Are we free from sin or are we still slaves to sin? The answer to the question is quite simple: yes, if we have been Baptized with Christ then we are free from sin; but, sin is a serious illness with lasting effects and even though we may be free, we still experience the temptation to return to

our old ways. We must daily pick up our cross, if we are to defeat these temptations. We must daily die to sin, if we are to one day be made completely whole.

Although we have been set free from bondage to sin, we are still living with the deep wounds that it has set within our hearts. Yes, we have been healed by Jesus our Great Physician, but we are not yet fully whole. We are getting better, but the treatment is not over. We must allow the Great Physician to continue the good work that he has begun in us, and with fear and trembling, work out our salvation by continuously receiving from Christ the medicine of our souls. We must allow Jesus to heal us by the grace which He makes available to us through the Sacraments of His Church.

Just as victims of abusive relationships often return to their abuser, even after they have been given a way out, so do we continue to return to the service of our old master: sin. Or, to paraphrase the wisdom of the Proverbs: As a dog returns to his vomit, so we as fools return to our folly. Yes, we can be one day be fully healed, but in order for this to happen, we must align our wills to the will of God. We must allow Him to daily set us free...to daily guide us in the service of perfect freedom.

Today, Saint Paul exhorts us to daily grow in grace and to more perfectly yield our members to the service of Almighty God. Each day of our life, we ought to be becoming more and more committed to the God whose service is perfect freedom. If we strive after this prize, if we run as to win this race, by God's grace, we will one day be completely free from sin. We will no longer experience the temptation to return to our old master. On that day, we will be counted among the saints, who being transfigured by the grace of God, are no longer capable of sin.

As we close our meditation this morning, I want each of us to ask ourselves, "Am I yielding my members to righteousness? Am I taking seriously how deadly sin really is? Am I making use of the antidotes Christ has given unto me in His Church?"

May God daily makes us holier as we strive to yield our members unto righteousness, and may our fruit be holiness and our end, eternal life.

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