

The Church tells us that, while Ordinary Time is for contemplating the mystery of the faith in its entirety, the special liturgical seasons are for contemplating a particular mystery. For this Christmas season, I proposed pondering the question of: why did Jesus come? For Church going Catholics it probably sounds like too easy of a question. But as a person digs down into it they quickly realize that there is a lot to this question. As the question is pressed another deeper, more fundamental, question arises, namely: is there a human soul and if there is, is it immortal? If not, there was no point to the Incarnation; man can figure out well enough for himself how to eat, drink, and be merry. Is the question of: “is there a human soul and if so, is it immortal” too simple, too basic? Well, do people – Church going Catholics – really live as if that is the case? Do I? Is it first and foremost in my mind day in and day out? If the reality of the immortality of the human soul was something that I absolutely know down to the core of my being, it would have a big effect on what I am, what I prioritize, how I think, speak, and act. Care of the soul would be the most important thing in this life.

It's easy for a person to create their own standards and figure they're pretty good; holiness is, well, being like me of course. Is that really true? What is it really like if a person lives first and foremost for the sake of their immortal soul? I might consider how I compare to the examples provided by Our Lord through His saints, a number of which are encountered during the Christmas season. Anna, the prophetess at the Temple, is one. Luke says that her husband died 7 years after she was married – so she was probably around 25 years old when she became a widow. She was 84 at the time of the presentation and Luke tells us that she was in the Temple day and night praying and fasting. When she saw Mary & Joseph bring our Lord to the Temple for the Presentation, she was given knowledge of who He is and praised God. So what does our Lord show us with Anna? For the person who knows human life never ends but just changes with physical death, they provide for their material needs in this life, yes, but their first and foremost desire is to see the Lord. They go to bed and wake up with that desire and it directs everything they think, say, and do. Take some time and think about the example of Anna and let it really settle in your mind. If I keep it before my eyes, I will start to follow it.

The Lord, through His Church, provides another example during the Christmas season – St Stephen, whose feast is the day after Christmas. St Stephen was the first martyr of the Church and one of the first 7 deacons ordained by the Apostles. St Stephen was a martyr; he was executed in a violent way. What is my first thought about that being not just part of the Christmas season but indeed the very first day after Christmas? Some might think – well that's not very nice; Christmas is for feeling good, for happy thoughts. Would this be the thought of someone who knows the human soul is immortal, so much so that that's what they live for? Was it Stephen's thought? St Stephen lived for one thing, desired one thing, to serve the Lord and be with Him forever in Heaven. He knew his soul was immortal and that man does have a destiny and his one desire was to reach that destiny. He cared little for this life, so little that he was more than happy to sacrifice it because he knew he was immortal and that our Lord had purchased for us the way to eternal life. Stephen was in fact given a vision of Heaven right before his death. Stephen called out that he saw God and Jesus standing at His right hand. We are not alone, the soul is immortal, and our Lord waits for us to choose Him in this life. Stephen prayed for those stoning him. Could a person do such a thing if they were living mainly for this life and this world, if their immortality was not first and foremost in their mind? How easily we hang onto hard feelings, ill will, grudges and all the like for much less than what Stephen endured.

Did Stephen's prayer for those taking his physical life (but who could not touch his immortal soul) have any effect? The one who led the execution (stoning) of St Stephen was a man named Saul. Saul was a Pharisee who was persecuting the Church with an almost blind vengeance. Today Saul is known as St Paul and he resides in perfect peace, harmony, and happiness with Stephen. Could Stephen have desired such a thing, prayed for it, if his focus was not on the immortality of the soul? Prior to his conversion, Saul/Paul deluded himself into thinking that he was doing the Lord's work by killing our Lord's followers, our ancestors, our fathers in faith. He wanted glory in the here and now. It was only through the intercession of Stephen, who sought first and foremost the good of his immortal soul, that Saul was saved from eternal misery. Putting first things first has never-ending good consequences not only for the individual person but for others as well. All of

the good that Paul would bring about redounds now, for all eternity, to St Stephen as well. How do you want to live? First and foremost for your immortal soul, or like some sort of swine with your nose stuck firmly in the ground, never looking up, never knowing anything else?

What about Paul? Did his conversion result in this change of focus, from worldly life to the immortality of his soul? Or did he just now say: well, glory here and now but instead I'll be for Christ instead of against Him? Did he live for the immortality of his soul or for the here and now? Here are some of his words in his letter to the Phillipians:

“Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

How can death be gain if a person is not immortal, if there is not something infinitely greater than this world waiting for those who bind themselves to the Lord? Notice also that Paul is expressing competing desires within himself. On the one hand, he is like a child who really wants to get to the amusement park and eat ice cream and ride all the rides; the child thinks of that day after day and can't wait to get there. On the other hand, he is like a good son who loves his father and wants to serve him, do good for him. Paul really wants to go home (he is immortal) to the Heavenly delights – like wanting to get to the amusement park. On the other hand, he wants to serve the Lord by building up His Kingdom here on earth. This is the constant mindset of one who knows they are immortal. Is it mine?

The emphasis in this article is on examples of what it is like to keep our immortality at the fore of our mind. One of the reasons for this is because it so easy to let it slip from our minds and live as if this world and this life is all there is. But as a little bit of an aside, there is a second reason as well – which is that that we are bombarded with messages of the opposite. This is almost unimaginable but there are those who apparently “believe in the bible” and yet claim that man is not immortal. I did a little internet search on the immortality of the human soul. Of course there are many claims. Not surprisingly some call it a myth, others a “philosophy.” But using Scripture to claim that the soul is not immortal is so backwards and upside down that it is stunning. St Paul's letter to the Phillipians is *just one* reference in Scripture that reminds us that the immortality of the human soul is something revealed by God. If it's not true, there was no reason for Jesus to come.

Coming back to examples from the Christmas season of those who held the immortality of the human soul as a premier truth to live by, we would be completely remiss if we did not finish with the prime example – our Holy Mother. Perhaps her greatest example is at the Annunciation: let it be done unto to me according to your word. Care for my immortal soul means growing in knowledge and love of our Lord. Love of God means that I want to do His will. Beyond our Lord Himself, acting in and through His human nature, our Holy Mother is the prime and perfect example of this. No one who has been trapped by the things of this life and this world, shunning the immortality of their soul, can say the words of Mary: let it be done unto me according to your word. The message of Revelation is that the nature of love is sacrifice of self for the sake of the other. Love of God is sacrifice of self for Him, His commands, His way. I cannot say there was any point in our Lord becoming man unless I except the premier example of Mary: let it be done unto me according to your word. I will never be able to do that unless the immortality of the human soul is first and foremost in my mind. There is simply no point in laying down my life in the here and now unless that is true.

Much is said about “spirituality” but there is no authentic “spirituality” without a deep acceptance of the dogmatic truths revealed to us by God. Any “spirituality” that sets aside these deepest truths is man-made and leads nowhere other than eternal misery and frustration. Why did Jesus come? There's no point to it unless the human soul is immortal. Spend some time this Christmas burying that reality in the depths of your mind.

*God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*