

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A-2026

In our reading from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus proclaims: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.”

These words reveal that God has the ultimate authority over eternal salvation and eternal damnation. That being the case, God only gives someone the joy or misery they have freely chosen unto death. In light of the radiant goodness and truth of God, when we come before Him at our personal judgement, we will know beyond a shadow of a doubt our eternal destiny. We will know that it is a fair and just pronouncement by God. For better or for worse, it is what we truly wanted as reflected through our habitual and persistent attitudes, words, actions, and lifestyle.

Even though Jesus Christ is the one who pronounces the eternal destiny of our souls, we are the ones with the spiritual power to kill our souls. We do when so we

distance ourselves from God and His will by choosing to commit serious sin known as mortal sin. Mortal sin is sin that brings spiritual death during our lives, and if we persist until death, it brings about eternal separation from God. Our Catholic faith teaches us that we are only responsible for mortal sin before God if it is sin of a serious nature, we have knowledge that it is a mortal sin, and we freely choose to embrace the mortal sin. For a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of the nature of mortal sin and its various manifestations, please read the Bible and the moral section of the Catholic Catechism. As Catholic Christians we have a serious moral obligation to inform ourselves on matters of faith and morality. If we intentionally and purposely choose not to, we cannot plead innocence or ignorance before God. We become personally responsible for our decision to remain blissfully unaware. Our Catholic faith teaches us that if we are conscious of mortal sin in our lives, it is necessary to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving Holy Communion. The good news is that Jesus Christ will forgive us of all of our mortal sins,

if we confess our sins, and repent, by sincerely striving to change our lives with the help of God and other people. In the process, our souls move to spiritual death to new life.

Switching gears, and broadening my approach, God in His infinite wisdom and love has fashioned human beings as body and soul, or an embodied spirit. This makes us uniquely human as the angels are pure spirit. As an embodied spirit, we are called to take vigilant care of both body and soul. We take care of our bodies through being attentive to our physical appearance in a balanced manner, dressing in a modest and dignified manner, healthy diet, moderate exercise, and fidelity to our ongoing health care and physical well-being. Taking care of our bodies has a positive effect on our souls as it helps us to develop our capacity to be disciplined and good and faithful stewards of God's gifts and blessings. It also lifts our spirits and helps us to love and serve the Lord and His people with greater confidence, joy, vitality, and longevity.

As vigilant as we are called to be concerning the welfare of our bodies, we are called to be even more conscientious when it comes to the welfare of our eternal souls. Every day, our soul care is meant to be our number one priority in our lives. As Jesus Himself proclaims elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew: “What is it to gain the whole world and lose your own soul? Applying these words to matters of the body, “What is it to have the most attractive appearance and best body, and lose your own soul? “What is it to enjoy the forbidden and unforbidden pleasures of the flesh and the world, and lose your own soul?

Our soul care directly affects our earthly and eternal happiness, but if we are not careful, it can become an afterthought. It can be easily drowned out by the responsibilities and the busyness of daily living, endless distractions and diversions, and our sometimes insatiable need for attention and admiration. In an address to brother priests, St. Charles Borromeo, who was a Bishop and Cardinal, stated: “Are you in charge of a church parish? If so, do not neglect the parish of your own soul. Do not give

yourselves to others so completely that you have nothing left for yourself. You have to be mindful of your people without becoming forgetful of yourself.” I would further clarify his statement by stating, “without becoming forgetful of God.”

As laity, you are in charge of the parish of your own home and workplace. In the process of living out your calling, please do not neglect the parish of your own soul. After all, what is it to give yourself generously to your family and job, and lose your own soul? Instead, allow your whole approach to life and service, to flow directly from your deep and intimate daily union with and fidelity to, Jesus Christ. Intentionally live mindful of Jesus. Intentionally serve other people out of your relationship with Christ. Allow Him to be the One in whom you live, and move, and have your being.”

Anything outside of that is ultimately in vain.

I would like to briefly reflect on the various dimensions of soul care, and how individually and collectively, they contribute to ever growing SOUL POWER. We ENLARGE our souls through daily prayer and the humble and loving treatment and service of other

people. We EMPOWER our souls through growth in the Christian virtues and our encounter with Jesus Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. We CLEANSE and POLISH our souls through the forgiveness of sins and the grace that flows from the sacrament of Reconciliation, or Confession. We ENLIGHTEN our souls by growing in our knowledge of and living out of the Bible and church teaching.

I would like to put all this talk of “soul care” and “soul power” within a relational context that is powerfully captured in the following lyrics by the country singer Alan Jackson: “Once in a lifetime love. Love like we’ve all dreamed of. It may go disguised right before your eyes. Once in a lifetime love.” Even though the love of Jesus Christ may seem to be disguised before our very eyes, it is there, and it is the ultimate “once in a lifetime love.” Why? Because He loved us before we loved Him, especially through His saving death and resurrection. He loves us more than anyone that we have ever met or ever will meet. He is with us at all times. He is willing to listen to us talk, complain, or grieve whenever we want or need to. He is willing to

forgive us for all of our sins. He loves us, and works through us, even in our sins and imperfections.

And the most exciting part, is that He wants a relationship that lasts forever. He wants our “once in a lifetime love” to become an “endless love.” The soul language of this profound and endless love is captured in the following lyrics by the duet of Diana Ross and Lionel Richie: “My first love. You’re every breath I take. You’re every step I make. And I, I want to share. All my love with you. No one else will do.” Later on they sing: “Two hearts. Two hearts that beat as one. Our lives have just begun.” In the final verse they sing: “Cause no one can deny this love I have inside. And I’ll give it all to you. My love, my love, my love. My endless love.”

These words poetically describe the ultimate soul power. This is the soul power that Jesus Christ wants to share with us. This is the soul power that we are called to share with Him. This is the soul power that has the power to change hearts and lives and save the world.

