



Fulfilling Our Deepest Desires

IN CHAPTER 10 OF THE GOSPEL OF ST. MARK, we find the disciples James and John approaching the Lord with a request. They have a request that expresses something they want more than anything else, a request that expresses the deepest desires of their hearts. They ask the Lord: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mk. 10:37). It is worth noting not only how Our Lord responds to the two disciples, but also how he *doesn't* respond to them. Our Lord doesn't respond to the disciples by giving them a lecture on the evils of pride and ambition. He also doesn't call into question the motive of their desires and He doesn't say anything that would in any way dampen or diminish their desires. By acting in this way Our Lord acknowledges the basic goodness of their desires. The request which the two disciples make implies a deep faith that Jesus is in fact the Messiah, that He is the King of a real Kingdom and He possesses the authority to bestow a share in that Kingdom on whomever He wills. More than anything else, the disciples want a share in that Kingdom. Perhaps the situation in the Church and in our own lives would be much better if more of us shared these same

ardent desires.

Reflection on this episode in the Gospel raises a question for us: What are our deepest desires? What do we want, more than anything else? I don't think

“Imagine Our Lord asking: ‘What do you want from me? What can I do for you?’ What would you say?”

this is a question which is so easily answered. In some ways it is quite difficult to understand ourselves and our own desires. We are easily deceived in the things we desire. We think we know what we want and we can spend quite a bit of time and energy and effort in trying to obtain it. But then, once we obtain it, we realize that we're not satisfied and our hearts remain hungry for something else or for something

more and we anxiously go on to pursue something further. So what is it that we *really* want? Another way of posing the question would be to imagine Our Lord appearing to us and looking us in the eye and asking: “What do you want from me? What can I do for you?” What would you say? I think the first reaction of many of us to this question would be that we want the Lord to free us from certain difficulties, pains, sufferings, humiliations; we want Him to free us from all that causes us to be anxious and fearful. That would be a natural reaction to have, but would freedom from those things

really satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts?

At the end of his life the Lord appeared to St. Thomas Aquinas. The Lord said to him: “Thomas, you have written well of me. What would you like as your reward”? And St. Thomas, being the great theologian that he was, gave the perfect response to that question. He said, “*Non, nisi te, Domine*: Nothing, except you, O Lord”. When I posed the question to you a minute ago, if the Lord appeared to you and asked you: “What do you want from me?” did you think to respond: I just want more of you Lord?

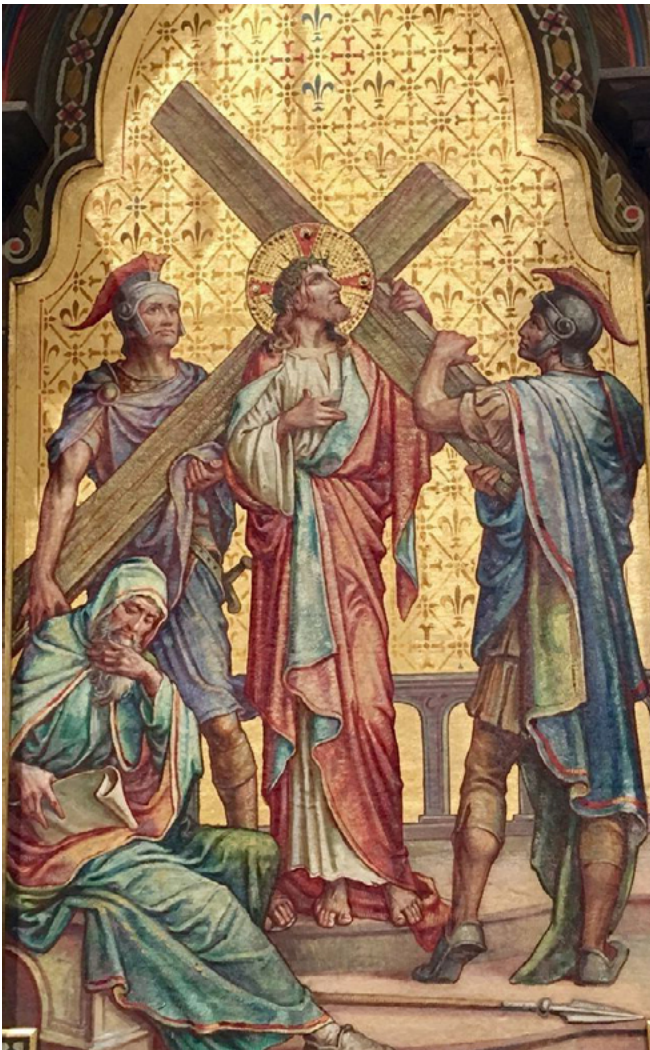
What we *really* want is something that will completely satisfy our hearts in a way that is permanent and secure. In other words, in all our feverish pursuit of the goods of this world, what we are really looking for is God; we want this infinite ocean of goodness and beauty. We could be even more specific: what we really want is to enter into an intimate personal communion

with God. We want to be known and loved by God and to know and love Him in return. That is what we were made for, what we were designed for. That kind of union can already begin in this life.

And so when the disciples ask for a special place in the Kingdom of God, Our Lord does not discourage their desires. But what Our Lord does do is teach them that they can't come to the realization of their desires except by means of a painful process of purification: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” The disciples have basically good and praiseworthy desires, but they don't realize that the way to the fulfillment of those desires is through a kind of dying to themselves. The fulfillment of their desires comes by way of the cross. This is a lesson that we don't easily grasp.

Contrary to this teaching of Our Lord, one will find among some Christians of our day a prevailing attitude of presumption, that is, the notion that we can have God's forgiveness and grace without repentance and conversion; that we can be in His good favor while disregarding His commandments and the moral demands of the Gospel; and, in the end, that we can come to a participation in His glorious resurrection without also a participation in His suffering and cross. This is what you could call the doctrine of cheap grace, the notion that our salvation and sanctification should be easy and need not cost us anything. This is contrary to what Our Lord has revealed to us. “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”. The truth that it is by means of the cross in our lives that we come to salvation and sanctification is a truth that can set us free – free from many illusions and frustrations. It is a truth that is necessary if we are ever to come to encounter in a deeper way the love of God in our lives. One of the greatest realizations we can come to in our life of faith is that the sufferings and trials of life are really an effect of God's purifying love. He wants to use all the evils in our lives to bring us closer to Him.

And then also, although it is true that God can bring our souls to a high degree of sanctity in a short period of time, as He did with some of the saints, as with St. Thérèse or the children of Fatima, still it would seem



that for most of us, a deep union with God is something which normally only comes about after decades of patient perseverance. We live in an age which likes to see quick results, that looks for a quick return on one's investment. But growth in the virtues and in the interior life are not usually like that. Sanctity is more often the work of a long, frequently painful, persevering struggle which involves a continual dying to self, so

that we can be filled more and more with the spirit and the love of God. It is usually a work of great patience, which is like courage in slow motion. It is something which manifests the greatness of the human spirit and in the end it is, above all, an effect of God's grace and divine love working in the soul.



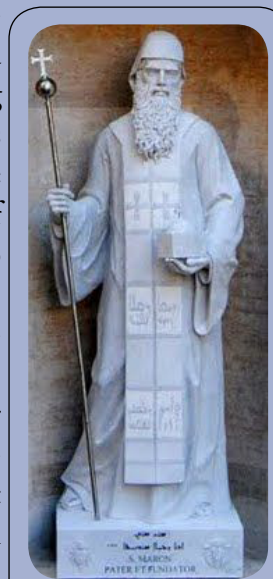
St. Maron and the Maronites

Every now and then we encounter someone who is unfamiliar with the Eastern Catholic Churches and who invariably refers to us as "Marianites." Although we have a great devotion to our Lady, the Maronite Church was named after St. Maron, a fifth century hermit in Syria, whose feast we celebrate on February 9th.

Perhaps the reason why so few have heard of St. Maron is because there is so little written on him. What little we know comes from Bishop Theodoret of Cyrhus, who visited the many holy men and women hermits living within his diocese, writing something on each of them in his *History of the Monks of Syria*. Although St. Maron had died by then (d. 410AD), his reputation for holiness lived on, especially through his many disciples. Theodoret

writes that he was an open-air hermit, that is, one who lived most of the time with little or no protection from the elements and that he was renown for his gift of healing of both body and soul. He also mentions that "it was he who planted for God the garden that now flourishes in the region of Cyrhus" referring to those who wished to imitate his life, including the hermit, St. James of Cyr, whom Theodoret met personally.

Over the course of time, the number of followers of St. Maron grew exponentially, leading to the election of the first Maronite Patriarch of Antioch, St. John Maron (d. 707AD). It was he who moved the Maronites to the region of Lebanon, where most Maronites come from today. But that's a whole other story!



Statue of St. Maron at St. Peter's Basilica.