

with Father Dave Pinto

## Fifth Sunday of Lent

### Sign: Assurance & Acceptance

The “S” in ECORSA is the sign that God gives us when he accepts our willingness to listen to Him, as well as proof that He really wants what He is asking of us. The sign is also proof that God is working with us and supporting us: “I am with you.” This “sign,” becomes no more evident than when we are in prayer.

When the mystics and spiritual writers talk about the different levels or kinds of prayer, they are attempting to describe and categorize the different stages of union between the soul and the ego. The ideal stage of union is when the ego allows the soul to completely control and led it in its ascent into the presence of God. This most perfect union, other than the Incarnation, is found in our Blessed Mother. Her union of soul and ego is so complete, that Revelation describes her as the tabernacle in heaven where Christ’s sacrifice is continually remembered before His Father.

On earth, in this space-time continuum, the saints come closest to this perfect union of soul and ego. To be Saint-like, our calling involves the constant growth of our prayer life. *Pseudo-dionysius* was the first to use the language of purgation, illumination, and union to describe the different stages of prayer. Thomas Merton collapsed the long historical development with his definitions.

1. **Purgative:** Genuine contemplation involves a Christ-like emptying or radical detachment from all forms of selfishness in preparation for genuine love and service of neighbor.
2. **Illuminative:** Transformation of consciousness. Prayer, meditation and contemplation provide not an escape from the world, but the best means for seeing it in God’s light. Allows one to critique unjust structures of society.
3. **Unitive:** A personal experience of God culminating in a loving union of transformation. Interpenetration of God and the contemplative mutually dwelling within each other. Leads to very effective and fruitful service in the world, and a prophetic ministry which addresses social and political issues in light of the Gospel.

The category or type of prayer is also good to be aware of, as it will help us to know what mechanism we are employing. There are two major types of prayer:

**Kataphatic** advanced by Bernard of Clairvaux and Ignatius Loyola. This method affirms that God the Creator can be known by way of analogy through images, symbols, and concepts from human experience and the created world, for God has manifested himself in creation and salvation history. We use these images to approach God. Use of imagination and affectivity, stresses meditation on the life and person of Jesus.

**Apophatic** advanced by Gregory of Nyssa in his *The Life of Moses*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and John of the Cross. This method springs from the recognition of the poverty of the human language in the face of the divine mystery. We approach God through surrender to the unknown, by abandoning images and entering the realm of mystery/the unknown. A quiet being within, a naked intent toward God. Emphasizes receptivity, listening, silence.

The forty days of Lent offer us the opportunity of purgation, preparation, and discovery. What we seek to purge our sin for; what we seek to prepare for; what we seek to discover; is transformation. We seek to be transformed into the call of Christ, which is to bring us to His Father. We can only come to the Father through Christ for He is the way, and He is calling us.