

One of the most common religious statues you can find other than Jesus Christ or the Blessed Virgin Mary is a statue of Bhudda. I am sure you have seen a statue of the prince Siddhartha Bhudda. He is usually depicted sitting in the “lotus position,” which is a comfortable sitting position for meditation. He most often is shown with his eyes peacefully closed, looking relaxed and rested, and sometimes fat. He has reached “enlightenment,” where he has renounced suffering, needs, and the pain of the world around him. Reaching deep within himself, he makes peace with the universe.

The Catholic author of the early 20th century, G.K. Chesterton, notes the difference between the early Christian images of the saints and the ancient statues of Bhudda. Christian saints are often depicted as standing up with very thin, gaunt bodies. Most of all, their eyes are open wide. They look hungry.

The contrast between the ideal of resting satisfaction and standing hunger is a major spiritual distinction. Self-sufficiency contrasted with total dependence on God. Gaunt bodies with open eyes communicate the need for God. Yet, we are often tempted with the hope of being self-sufficient and satisfied through our own actions.

“Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a barren bush in the desert.” The prophet Jeremiah warns deeply how trust in one's own strength leads in the end to dry desolation. “Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream.” The prophet blesses those who hunger and thirst, who yearn for God – for what is beyond them – for their creator and savior.

In the same way Jesus says “Woe to you who are rich, satisfied, mirthful, and praised by all.” Woe to you who are comfortable and self-satisfied. You will become poor, hungry, sad, and forgotten. On the other hand, be poor, be hungry, feel sorrow, and do not seek the praise of others. In the goodness of God, those who are poor, hungry, sorrowful, and humble will flourish and be truly alive.

We often approach God because there is something in our life that needs to change. Perhaps you are sorrowful, or hungry, or in great need, or you feel forgotten. It is often these very real needs that draw us close to God. These difficult places become the doorway to God's blessing because they pull you outside of yourself and your own sense of security. None of us is self-sufficient. Being hungry for God, crying out for justice, seeking consolation, these open our eyes and humble our spirit. These make us resemble a saint and less like a satisfied statue.

In the prophet Jeremiah, he describes the fruitful tree as having its roots stretched out into the stream of living water. Lent is quickly approaching. This Sunday comes as preparation to stretch out, stretch beyond yourself, to find life from the living God. Rejoice that you can be hungry and thirsty for God.