



Success. A word that awakens admiration, ambition, effort, and, in many cases, obsession. From childhood we are taught that we must “make it,” stand out, accumulate achievements, gain recognition, and build a life that others consider admirable. Social media has multiplied this pressure to unimaginable levels compared to just twenty years ago. Today, success often seems to be measured by followers, possessions, academic degrees, travel, influence, physical appearance, or financial wealth.

Yet there is one question that very few people dare to ask:

What will happen to all of that when death comes?

The Catholic faith answers with a clarity that is profoundly countercultural: **everything that is not united to God will eventually become dust.**

This statement is not meant to despise work, study, human progress, or professional development. The Church has never condemned success understood as the fruit of honest effort. What she continually warns against is making those temporal goods the center of our existence, replacing the only Absolute Good: God.

We live in an age that has confused success with happiness, fame with dignity, and wealth with blessing. But Sacred Scripture, the Tradition of the Church, and the witness of the saints offer an entirely different perspective.

This article seeks to be an uncomfortable reflection—but one that is deeply liberating.

Because what the world applauds today may disappear tomorrow.

And what seems invisible before men today may shine forever before God.

The Mirage of Modern Success

Never before has a generation had so many opportunities to make itself visible.

A viral video.

A successful business.



Thousands of followers.

Public recognition.

Awards.

Prestigious positions.

Yet never before has a generation experienced so much anxiety, existential emptiness, and fear of failure.

Why?

Because the human person was created for the infinite.

No finite success can fill a heart that was made for God.

Saint Augustine expressed this truth with one of the most profound sentences in Christian history:

“You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

The problem is not achieving success.

The problem is expecting success to do what only God can do.

The Bible Had Already Warned Us

Nearly three thousand years ago, the Book of Ecclesiastes described modern society with astonishing accuracy.

“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; vanity of vanities! All



| *is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2)*

The Hebrew word used here, **hebel**, literally means:

- vapor;
- smoke;
- mist;
- something that appears briefly and then disappears.

This does not mean that creation is evil.

It means that everything earthly is temporary.

A man works for decades.

He accumulates wealth.

He builds companies.

He writes books.

He erects buildings.

But the day will come when someone else inherits everything.

Ecclesiastes echoes another biblical truth found in Job:

| *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I
return.” (cf. Job 1:21)*

Nothing material crosses the threshold of death.

Nothing.



The Greatest Spiritual Mistake of Our Time

Perhaps the greatest cultural sin of our age is that we have forgotten eternity.

We live as though we were never going to die.

We plan our retirement.

We invest for thirty years from now.

We think about insurance.

Mortgages.

Vacations.

Professional careers.

But we rarely think about our souls.

Yet Christ never concealed this reality.

He declared with absolute clarity:

***“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and
forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36)***

It is one of the most radical questions in the Gospel.

Notice that Jesus does not say:

“Gain part of the world.”

He says:

“The whole world.”



Even if someone achieved absolute success...

If his soul were lost...

Everything would have failed.

The Rich Fool: A Parable for Our Century

Perhaps no parable describes modern civilization better than the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21).

The man enjoys an extraordinarily abundant harvest.

He decides to build larger barns.

He makes plans for many years ahead.

He tells himself:

“You have ample goods laid up for many years.”

But God replies:

| *“Fool! This very night your soul is required of you.”*

Everything ends in an instant.

Not because wealth was evil.

But because he had built his security upon something incapable of saving him.

Christ concludes:

| *“So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not*



| *rich toward God.” (Luke 12:21)*

Success According to Jesus Christ

It is striking to discover that Jesus never measured a person's life according to the standards by which we usually judge success.

He never asked:

How much money do you have?

How many followers do you have?

How many awards have you received?

How many properties have you accumulated?

Instead, He will ask something very different.

I was hungry...

Did you feed Me?

I was naked...

Did you clothe Me?

I was a stranger...

Did you welcome Me?

(cf. Matthew 25:31-46)

The Last Judgment does not revolve around prestige.

It revolves around love.



Because love endures.

Everything else disappears.

Dust Always Comes

The liturgy of Ash Wednesday preserves a phrase that has echoed through the centuries:

| *“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”*

This is not a threat.

It is an act of mercy.

The Church reminds us of a truth that modern society tries to hide.

We will die.

Every one of us.

Without exception.

The businessman.

The politician.

The athlete.

The artist.

The scientist.

The influencer.

The priest.



The Pope.

The beggar.

Death strips away every appearance of greatness.

Only what has been lived in God remains.

The Illusion of Control

Another great idol of our time is the belief that we control our lives.

Technology tempts us to think that everything depends on us.

But all it takes is:

An illness.

An accident.

An economic crisis.

A war.

A natural disaster.

And suddenly we realize how fragile we really are.

Scripture reminds us repeatedly:

“You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” (James 4:14)



This is not pessimism.

It is Christian realism.

The Saints Understood What the World Still Ignores

When we study the lives of the saints, we discover one common pattern.

They did not seek fame.

They sought holiness.

Many died completely unknown.

Some were despised.

Others were persecuted.

Many were considered failures.

Yet today they continue to illuminate the lives of millions.

Meanwhile, countless figures who dominated their own era are remembered only by a few lines in history books.

Human glory fades.

Holiness endures.



The Success That Never Dies

There is one kind of success that can never be destroyed.

It does not depend on the market.

Nor on the economy.

Nor on politics.

Nor on youth.

Nor on health.

It consists in reaching the end of life able to say:

“I have loved God.”

“I have remained faithful.”

“I have lived in the state of grace.”

“I have served others.”

“I have allowed Christ to transform my heart.”

This success continues beyond death.

Because it belongs to eternity.

The Theology of Temporal Realities

Catholic doctrine has never encouraged contempt for the created world. On the contrary, it teaches that creation is good because it comes from God (cf. Genesis 1). Work, science, art, culture, economics, and technological development all form part of humanity's vocation to cooperate with the Creator.



So where does the problem lie?

The problem begins when the order established by God is reversed.

Theology distinguishes between **temporal goods** and the **Supreme Good**. The former are genuine goods, but they are relative. They may and should be used rightly. The latter is God Himself, the only absolute Good. Whenever a relative good occupies the place reserved for the Absolute, it becomes an idol.

This is one of the great teachings of the First Commandment:

| ***“You shall have no other gods before Me.” (Exodus 20:3)***

Idolatry does not consist only in bowing before statues. It also appears whenever money, prestige, professional success, or even one's own image becomes the center around which life revolves.

That is why Jesus says so forcefully:

| ***“You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:24)***

He does not say it is impossible to possess wealth.

He says it is impossible to serve wealth as though it were a god.

When Success Becomes a New Religion

Our culture has built an alternative spirituality.

It has its own temples: financial centers, digital platforms, and stages where people constantly seek applause.



It has its own priests: success gurus, motivational coaches who promise happiness without conversion, influencers who display seemingly perfect lives.

It has its own dogmas:

“If you want it, you can achieve it.”

“Success depends only on you.”

“You are what you produce.”

“Your worth depends on others’ admiration.”

It even has its own liturgies:

Constantly checking statistics.

Comparing one’s life with everyone else’s.

Seeking approval that never truly satisfies.

From a pastoral perspective, this phenomenon deserves serious reflection. The human heart possesses an irrepressible religious dimension. If it does not worship the true God, it will inevitably absolutize some created reality.

The problem is not that man stops worshiping.

The problem is **what** he worships.

Death: The Forgotten Teacher

For centuries, Christian spirituality encouraged frequent meditation on death—not to produce fear, but to teach us how to live wisely. This ancient practice was known as *memento mori*:

“Remember that you must die.”

Today, this practice seems uncomfortable because we live in a culture determined to conceal



death. We avoid speaking about it. We hide it in hospitals and funeral homes. Yet precisely because death is certain, it remains one of life's greatest teachers.

Let us ask ourselves honestly:

- Which of today's worries will still matter one hundred years from now?
- Which arguments will still have meaning when we stand before God?
- Which possessions will accompany us into the Particular Judgment?

Answering these questions sincerely helps us reorder our priorities.

The True Treasure

Jesus offers a radiant alternative to the endless pursuit of earthly possessions:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21)

The expression “treasures in heaven” is not an empty metaphor. It refers to every work accomplished while living in God's grace: charity, prayer, sacrifices offered with love, works of mercy, daily fidelity, forgiveness, patience in suffering, and perseverance in faith.

None of these are ever lost.

All possess eternal value because they participate in the love of Christ.



How Can We Live in the World Without Belonging to It?

Christians are not called to flee from society or despise earthly responsibilities. They are called to work with excellence, study diligently, support their families, practice their professions honestly, and contribute to the common good.

But all these things must be done with a free heart.

Christian freedom means being able to say:

- If God grants me success, I will place it at His service.
- If He permits failure, I will continue trusting Him.
- If I receive honors, I will guard my heart against pride.
- If I am forgotten by men, I will remember that God knows my name.

This interior freedom is one of the greatest fruits of the spiritual life.

Practical Pastoral Applications

This reflection is not intended to discourage those who work, study, or undertake great projects. On the contrary, it invites us to purify the intentions with which we do these things.

Some practical habits can help:

- Begin each day by offering your work to God, asking that everything may glorify Him.
- Regularly examine whether professional success is pushing aside your sacramental life, prayer, or family.
- Practice almsgiving and generosity to remember that earthly goods are entrusted to us, not absolutely owned by us.
- Go frequently to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where hidden idols of the heart are exposed and healed.
- Participate faithfully in the Holy Mass, where we learn that the greatest victory in history was revealed, paradoxically, on Christ's Cross.



The Paradox of the Cross

From a purely human perspective, Jesus Christ died as a failure.

He was betrayed.

Abandoned by many of His disciples.

Unjustly condemned.

Executed in the most humiliating manner reserved for criminals.

Yet precisely in that apparent defeat, the definitive victory over sin and death was accomplished.

The Cross reveals that God's success does not always coincide with the world's success.

While human logic seeks domination, Christ triumphs by surrendering Himself.

While the world glorifies power, He reveals the strength of obedient love toward the Father.

Therefore, Christians should not be surprised if fidelity to the Gospel is not always applauded.

The true measure of Christian success is not popularity.

It is holiness.

A Final Question

Imagine that your life ended today.

Not forty years from now.

Not after retirement.



Today.

What would remain?

A brilliant résumé?

A large bank account?

A famous name?

Or a heart transformed into the likeness of Christ?

History teaches us that empires fall, fortunes change hands, fashions fade, and the most celebrated names are eventually forgotten.

What remains forever is whatever has been united to the love of God.

Perhaps the greatest success is not that the world remembers our name, but that, at the end of our earthly journey, we may hear the words every Christian should long for above all earthly recognition:

*“Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of
your master.” (Matthew 25:23)*

Then we shall fully understand that what the world called success was often nothing more than dust carried away by the wind.

But a life lived in the state of grace, steadfast faith, humble charity, and unwavering fidelity to Christ will have acquired an eternal weight that no death can ever destroy.

For true success does not consist in rising higher than others.

It consists in reaching Heaven.

There, where **“neither moth nor rust destroys”** (cf. Matthew 6:20), everything offered out of love for God remains forever.

That is the only victory that will never be reduced to dust.