

Easter 2015 “How do you define life?”

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My friends, how do you define life? Archbishop Fulton Sheen in his book *The Eternal Galilean* writes, “As the Church chants her Alleluias and the dead things rise to life, in token of the Resurrection of Our Lord and Saviour there is one great thought to be borne in mind, and that is, *what we call life is only death*. The only life is the life of the Risen King.”

You see, Archbishop Sheen wants us to consider how society would have us define life. Without a sense for God, Society would define life as the temporary endowment of vital forces that animate our bodies. We can see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and feel a pumping in our hearts. To support these bodily processes, we work, gather food, and do what we can to increase our quality of life. We would consider death to be a cessation of bodily processes and physical gratifications that we worked so hard in life to maintain. Jesus taught us however to think of life and death in a new way. Life is living in God. Death is life without God.

During Jesus’ earthly life, the disciples enjoyed Jesus’ ministry of teaching and healing. They were enthusiastic about following in the footsteps of Christ the teacher. It looked like a good way of life. Whenever Jesus spoke of suffering, however, or dying for our sins, and rising again, the disciples didn’t believe him really. When Jesus spoke like this, Peter even tried to discourage him. This is why, of course, when Jesus was arrested and subsequently condemned, the disciples fled in every direction to save their necks. They liked their quality of life on Palm Sunday, with the inhabitants of Jerusalem welcoming them like royalty. When their public opinion polls plummeted on Holy Thursday, they fled.

You see, they still were thinking about their lives the way human beings think about life, not the way God defines life. And although the women and the Beloved Disciple stayed close to the end, even they had their doubts. After all, when the women brought their spices very early in the morning to anoint his body, they weren't expecting the stone to be rolled away. They certainly weren't expecting the tomb to be empty. Mary of Magdala, Peter and the Beloved Disciple didn't believe Jesus had risen until they saw the empty tomb themselves.

My friends, when you consider that the followers of Jesus went from desertion and disbelief to proclaiming in the town square the resurrection of the Lord only a few days after his death, something happened. What happened? Resurexit secut dixit. Jesus rose from the dead, just like he said he would. That is what happened. The same disciples who fled the night before were only days later risking their lives to proclaim the Risen Christ. This was an activity their life insurance agent would not have approved of. They were eventually tortured and martyred for this belief. In only a couple of days, they radically changed their perspectives on the meaning of their lives. What happened? The risen Lord gave them a new definition of what life is about. That is what happened. Life isn't about how many days we live on this earth, or how big our house is, or how nice our car is. Life is about living our lives for God in the manner we love God and neighbor. Everything else in life turns to dust, but faith hope and love remain, as St. Paul puts it, and the greatest of these is love. God demonstrates this love, that while we were still sinners, God sent his only Son to suffer for our sins, catch us in our fall to perdition and raise us into eternal life. Jesus taught us that this journey of grace begins in baptism.

Following St. Paul, St. Basil tells us, "We imitate Christ's death by being buried with him in baptism. If we ask what this kind of burial means and what benefit we may hope to derive from it, it means first of all making a complete break with our former

way of life, and our Lord Himself said that this cannot be done unless we are born again.”

After we rise into new life from the waters of baptism, we are to be sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation. This sacrament empowers us with grace for active participation in the worship and apostolic life of the Church.

Finally, our souls become hungry. Jesus provides us true food and true drink by offering his very body and blood in the Holy Eucharist. When we receive Christ, we are to become Christ to the world in the manner we love God and neighbor in our daily lives.

Archbishop Sheen suggests that most of us have tried everything else on this earth to fill the God shaped hole in our hearts. Following St. Augustine, our hearts are restless until they rest in God. How many years go by that we can allow our hearts to be restless, settling for less than what God can provide? Archbishop Sheen suggests that although we can try materialism, we can try atheism, and we can try indifference, we can find ourselves in life “Always learning but never coming to a knowledge of truth.”

Archbishop Sheen writes, “There is only one experiment that modern man has not definitely, really tried, and that is the love, not of Jesus the Teacher, Jesus the social reformer, Jesus the humanitarian, but He Who is true God and true man, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

He continues, “Somewhere on earth His unerring absolute truth still abides; somewhere on earth His Divine Life flows out into hearts like fresh springs from an Eternal Fountain; ... somewhere Christ lives, loves and teaches, and where that beautiful somewhere is, hundreds of millions of souls on this earth already know; but where the other sheep know not through no fault

of their own. That beautiful somewhere is the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ.”

And so we are invited to consider how do we define life? How do we define our existence? Think of all the ways our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Our journey to God just might begin with how we choose to define life. The Gospel gives us the sincere suggestion: Life is living in God. Death is life without God. Jesus shows us the way to the fullness of life in his passion, death and resurrection. We are called to follow.