

## 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Death is Not the End”

Fr. Frank Schuster

When we are faced with the death of a loved one there is a stubborn sensibility within us that says death is not the end. How can the light that we see in each other be lost forever? Even when faced with our own mortality, there is something instinctual within us that communicates life goes on after death. Theologians, poets and artists throughout history have tried to describe this un-describable and innate sensibility within us. Artists for millenniums, for example, throughout cultures, have put wings on people to describe angels and heavenly beings. By placing wings on human beings, these artists over the ages have depicted something we know instinctually. There is something about us that transcends the world in which we live. Theologian Karl Rahner suggests, how do we even ask the question of eternal life unless there is something within us that begs the question in the first place? A bird is born with wings and in time learns how to fly through the power of instinct. Similarly, we are born with eternal souls that eventually soar off into everlasting life. There is a nagging instinct within our nature that says, “Death is not the end”. We are meant to live forever.

This sensibility is in our ancient first reading from Wisdom. It begins with the very striking statement, “God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.” God formed us to be imperishable, by his own image and likeness he created us. The author argues following Genesis that it is through the power of sin that death entered into the world. And notice how this was a fantastically different understanding of God than many of the pagan religions in circulation during the author’s day. The pagan gods couldn’t care less whether human beings lived or died. This is why so many sacrificed to them in ancient times so to gain favors or protection. What was unique about Judaism was the revelation that there was only one God, Lord of heaven and earth, and this God not only loved the human race, he created us in his own image and likeness. What is unique about Christianity is that it is not we who make sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of our sins. God rather sacrifices himself for us for the forgiveness of our sins.

And so notice that when God becomes human for the sake of our salvation in the person of Jesus Christ that he comes to us as a healer. The Gospel reading recounts how the woman only needed to touch the hem of Jesus’ garments to be healed of her affliction. Jesus also resuscitates Jarius’ daughter from death in our Gospel reading today. God comes to us not as a war lord or a prince or a king, but in the words of St. Paul, though God was rich, he became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich. You see Jesus wasn’t satisfied with just being another teacher or a miracle worker. He comes to us as a savior to heal our wounds at the very root of our disease by dying for our sins. He opens the doors to heaven for us where death has no more power.

The scriptures this Sunday draw our attention to the truth that God is a God of life and not a God of death. And this was problematic for some of Jesus' followers who had hoped he would be more like King David, a military liberator. Jesus, however, did not come to liberate Israel from the Romans. Jesus came to liberate the world. This is why, as we approach the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and celebrate our country's independence, it is good to be reminded as Catholic Christians that if ever enemies of our country pray for our destruction, we should pray for their conversion. If our enemies ever pray for war, we should pray for justice and for a just peace. When our enemies pray for our damnation, we should pray for their salvation. And because America embraces a number of people with different and at times opposed political beliefs, wouldn't it be great if we listened to each other more and yelled at each other less, not just in our politics but at home, or work, or in our neighborhoods as well? We need to pray for each other more in this country because this is the Christian way. This is our way because God does not rejoice in the destruction of the living but rather rejoices in our salvation.

You see, my friends, it seems to me like the whole world at times can be like that woman in the Gospel reading, hemorrhaging for centuries seeking desperately to touch the hem of her creator's garment. All of us feel like her at times, slowly bleeding to death inside. What are the areas in our life that is like that woman, slowly bleeding to death day by day? What are the areas in our life that are like the little girl, dead before life really began? If we can only reach Jesus through the noisy crowd of the culture around us, if we could only be bold and take the risk to touch the hem of our Creator's garment, and hear his voice, "your faith has saved you. Go in peace." If we could only hear the voice of our creator to rise from whatever grave we have a habit of burying ourselves in! We would have new life within us, a new compassion for the people around us and around the world, and a renewed relationship with the Lord of life who does not desire our death.

We know this instinctually in our hearts, that we were created for something more than what this life has to offer. Like birds that are born with the knowledge of flight without being taught, we have knowledge of transcendence within us that words fail to articulate. When words fail, artists, poets and theologians have something to offer. Theologians like St. Irenaus of Lyons, whose feast day was last Thursday, who said "*Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei*". The Glory of God is the living man, and the life of man is the vision of God.