

NOVEMBER 6, 2022: 32ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



One of the great privileges I have as a priest is to preside at funerals. I know that, for some, 'privilege' might seem a rather odd word to use. But, as a priest, I really do consider it just that—a privilege. Funerals are a hard moment in the lives of people, and it does not matter the age of the person who has died; for most people the sense of loss reaches to the deepest levels of their humanity. Ultimately, death is a mystery that seems impossible to penetrate. So, it is there that the sense of privilege comes to be understood.

As a society we have worked hard to shield ourselves from the reality of death. We almost consider death as something unnatural, and yet death is a natural part of life. I believe part of the problem lies in how we have slowly distanced ourselves from death. Just 50 years ago it was not unusual and still fairly normal for a wake to take place in the family home instead of a funeral home. The family would dress the body and watch vigil throughout the night. Because the wake took time, it was not unusual for food and drinks to be served during this ritual. At the gravesite we watched as the casket would be lowered into the ground and the mourners would throw dirt on it. What many people today might consider an awful experience to endure was actually part of the healing process. It allowed us to confront the reality of death and start asking the necessary questions. The more we distance ourselves from this part of life, the harder it is to confront what we fear or don't understand. We leave no room to truly mourn. We no longer want to have a funeral—we want a 'celebration of life'. Though death is real and hard to endure, it is *not* something we need to fear.

As a priest I believe I have a role in helping people confront the reality they are now facing. And I do so with an important message, to help them begin coming to terms with this great mystery. As Christians we know that death is not the end but, instead, a moment of transformation. In our baptism we died with Christ and rose to new life with Him. The seed of our mortal life has given way to the plant of immortality. Our lives now are but a shadow what is to come. This life is not the fullness of reality and it can *never* be. It is only when we are in perfect union with God that we can achieve the fullness of life. Our faith teaches us that when a person dies, they come face to face with God and Christ—our loving savior and merciful judge. Death is nothing to fear; rather, it is something to embrace when according to God's time we are called to be with Him. The person who dies, no matter the age, is never losing out. They are not missing out on some experience because, quite frankly, no matter what they can accomplish or experience here, it can never—and will never—equal being in the eternal presence of God. It is for this reason that Christ came into the world.

If Christ did not come and die on the cross, death would be something to fear. Heaven would be impossible except for the death and resurrection of Christ. Christ died so that we might truly live. And no human being can get into heaven except through the cross of Christ. It is the blood of Christ that cleanses us and makes us whole and transforms us to become re-imaged—like Mary—and made immaculate. Christ desires only one thing for us, and that is eternal life with the Father. God loves us so much that He sent his only son into the world, not to condemn the world but that we might live. God's love for us is so powerful and so unconditional that He sent Christ to us, even knowing that we would reject Him and kill Him. God wants so much to have a real relationship with us that He willingly sacrificed his only begotten son in order for us to know his love. So Christ, in union with the Father, made eternal life possible by his death and resurrection. In his humanity He cancelled out the 'no' of Adam and Eve, and in his divinity He transformed death into life and rejection into salvation. He showed the power of true love.

I know I have the greatest message I can possibly impart to people in this sad moment, and I consider it a privilege to do so. I cannot know if people will hear the message I present but, ultimately, my role is simply to plant seeds that will help them recognize the possibility that exists. Yes, we should be sad for our loss of a loved one in our lives. But we should be consoled, and even joyful for the person who goes before us, because they have entered into the fullness of life.