

Ordinary Time 32A 2017

Grieving with Hope

Every year I celebrate about 35 funerals. They come at unexpected and inconvenient times. And when they do, I remind myself that death has its own schedule; death is always inconvenient. Every funeral is different; every family grieves in its own way. Some families are filled with faith and understand death in the context of their faith. The faith of others is weak, and for their sake I wish it were stronger. Some deaths occur early and unexpectedly, others after a long life or a debilitating illness. Although every funeral is different, and although families deal with death differently, there is one constant: *when death occurs, everyone is faced with the ultimate question: what is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of death?*

Saint Paul deals with this question in today's second reading: his letter to the Thessalonians. HE wrote this letter about twenty years after the death of Jesus because the Thessalonians were confronting the death of their loved ones. The Thessalonians thought that the Lord Jesus would return and take them to heaven before they died. And so, when some of the members of their community died their faith was shaken. What is going to happen to our beloved dead? Faced with the grief and questions of his new converts, Paul must remind them—and us—of the Christian meaning of death.

He begins: "We do not want you unaware about those who have fallen asleep (died), so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope." Paul reminds the Thessalonians and us of what is most central to our faith—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, then we believe that God can raise us from the dead as well because there is an intimate bond between the resurrection of Jesus and our resurrection. Because God

raised Jesus from the dead, we are confident that God will raise us from the dead as well. Death is not the end of life but a change and transformation when we enter the risen life of Jesus Christ.

Most people I encounter at the time of a funeral understand this, and that is why they come to church for a funeral liturgy. But from time to time, I get a sense that some grieve like people who have no hope. All their hope is in this life alone, and so they view death as the end of life. They have no hope because they have lost hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They have no hope because they do not believe that the resurrection of Jesus has overcome the power of death.

What is our faith about? What is central to our faith? What allows us to live in and with hope? The answer is simple: It is faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If God raised Jesus the dead, then we are no longer condemned to eternal death. If God raised Jesus from the dead, we live in hope of resurrection life.

During this month of November, the church remembers the faithful departed. Here at St Mary's we remember the faithful departed in the Book of the Deceased and at Mass every day. We grieve for our departed loved ones, and we should. We miss them dearly, and we should. But we do not grieve as people who have no hope; for believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and because we believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we hope that God will raise our mortal, corruptible bodies into new and everlasting life.