

*Ordinary 10C 2013*  
*Father Frank Matera*  
*The Mystery of Death*

There is nothing more final than death. When it occurs, death is irrevocable. There is no going back, there is no return. Death is that moment of separation unlike any other. We can remember those who have died. We can pray for those who have died. We can mourn for those who have died. But we cannot call them back to life.

Because Jesus is the Son of God, he understood the power of death more than anyone else; and it filled him with intense sorrow and pain. And so, when he met the funeral procession of a young man who had died, the only son of a widowed mother, he was overcome with sorrow and compassion. He understood as no one else could understand the power and tragedy of death. He understood as no one else could understand the pain and sorrow of the widowed mother. He understood as no one else could the finality of death. And so, in an extraordinary act of power, he overcomes the power of death by raising the young man.

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Today's gospel proclaims what is most central to our Catholic faith: our firm belief that even though we will die, God has conquered the power of death by raising his Son Jesus Christ from the dead. Today's gospel proclaims that as long as we are in Christ we can live in a new way because we are no longer under the power and sway of death.

Our faith in the resurrection teaches us that the purpose and goal of life is to enjoy even now, something of Christ's resurrection life. Our hope in the resurrection of the dead reminds us there is more to life than what we see, touch, and hear. Our faith in the resurrection assures us that the fullness of life is life in Christ.

Many people, however, no longer comprehend the mystery of death. Their understanding of death has been distorted by the violence of video games and movies that portray the destruction of life without any sense of tragedy, sorrow, remorse, or loss. In such entertainment, if you can call it that, there is no sense of the mystery and tragedy of death. In such violence death is just a game. But death is *not* a game. It is a dangerous, threatening power that separates us from God and each other.

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For us who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, however, life is precious and death is a mystery. Life is precious because it is God's greatest gift; and death is a mystery whereby we enter into the resurrection life that the risen Christ already enjoys. This is why I am saddened when people abandon their Catholic faith. This is why I am saddened when people no longer share in the Eucharist. In abandoning the Eucharist, they forget that central mystery of our faith is God's victory over the power of death. In abandoning their faith they no longer participate in the Eucharist, which is the pledge of eternal life. In abandoning their faith, they become like the dead man of today's gospel who must be raised to new life.

Jesus raised the dead because he understood that death is the last and greatest enemy, the enemy we ourselves cannot conquer. He raised the son of the widow to assure us that the kingdom of God—God's rule over our lives—has overcome the power of death. Jesus raised the dead so that we might enter into eternal life, God's own life, the life that the risen Christ already experiences. This is why our faith is so important. This is why our faith is so precious. This is why we must proclaim the gospel again and again to those who have fallen away from our Eucharistic community.