

Having a Proper Perspective on our Mortality

Ash Wednesday Mass at the seminary was always opened up for some of the college students to attend.

I remember one year, the preacher, Msgr. Callaghan, the rector at the time, began his Ash Wednesday homily with the statement "you are going to die." I think it got the attention of some of the students.

Ash Wednesday of course reminds us of our mortality; from dust you came, to dust you shall return.

Death is not something we as a society like to think much about. We can put the very elderly and infirm in nursing homes and never visit them. We can avoid cemeteries. We can live for the moment. And when confronted with our mortality, we can become obsessed with control.

For instance, with the ongoing pandemic, precautions are reasonable. But there are some who will be so impacted by the constant Covid media coverage of the past 8 months that they will be mentally scarred for life. We can take all the precautions we want, but there's not much we can do to control Covid - as a saying goes "virus gonna virus." We can be cautious when we drive but may be hit by another driver. Ultimately, we are going to die. Yet sometimes we think we can cheat death or control it.

Yes, we can do some things as have tried to be done with Covid. We can take precautions too with other diseases and risky activities. This is prudent. But we also can't fall into the trap of thinking we control everything.

November as a month is a hard one to preach. The readings have a common theme: the world is passing away. You will die. You will be judged. So what are we to do? Look whats on our Netflix queue and forget about it? Just live for today? No. The answer is to live in this world, and prepare for the next, knowing two things: Jesus loves us, and that love requires a response.

This weekend starts Advent. The first days of Advent, the readings continue the theme of the world passing away. "Be watchful! Be alert" Jesus says in this week's Gospel. "You do not know when the time will come." (Mark 13:33). Good advice indeed. So what to do?

One, remember the words of the second reading this week from Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "God is faithful." God loves us. We take comfort in that. Tomorrow night on Monday evening, November 30th, we have our parish penance service. I'm continuing to hear confessions at 3:30 each Saturday afternoon. Experience mercy. Know God loves you. And even if you can't make it or are concerned about coming at this time, find time for prayer; open your hearts to God; know that we are not abandoned but loved, and God is journeying with us.

But the words of Jesus also remind us to prepare. Each day gives us another opportunity to bring good into the world. We can be present to people. We can pray with them. We can be a part of their lives. We can look at how we treat family member. We can do acts of charity. We can look at ourselves and say "OK, where have I fallen short in terms of my sins, and what do I need to do to become a better person." We do not just want to be a lukewarm Christian. We want to grow in grace daily - this only happens when we respond to it.

Yes, we will die. Yes, we will turn to dust. But Jesus changes all that through His birth, death and resurrection. Let us follow Him by responding to that, facing the reality of our morality remembering we can't control death, but we can control how we respond to grace. For the Christian, it means living for heaven through a life of love by bringing that love into this world through a life of love. Jesus journeys with us - so let us take up our crosses and follow Him, knowing His victory can be ours too.

Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever.

God bless,

Fr. Paul