

YEAR OF FAITH

32nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME | November 9-10, 2013

Death is a going away of sort. It is a time when we are challenged to say good bye. The good -byes that we make in death are unlike any other. We don't know when or where or how death will enter our human reality. We do know that no matter how much science we advance or technology we achieve death remains a part of human living. What we can say is that in between birth into this world and death that concludes our human life we have lots of opportunities to make choices, to speak, and to act in ways that give witness to our faith.

As we celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism, the ritual reminds us that we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Catholic Church teaches us that when we pass through the waters of spiritual regeneration we are claimed by God in Christ Jesus. We become a member of God's family the Church. We are saved. It is precisely because we are saved that we are called to think, act and speak differently than others in our society. We are called to an on-going conversion of heart and mind and spirit. This notion of conversion is for the Christian Disciple the development of a moral character that is consistent with our belief that God has saved us in Christ Jesus. Salvation is not only our hope, it is the goal toward which much of our life is oriented.

Recently I had the opportunity to celebrate the Rites of Christian Burial with a parish family who experienced the sudden death of a loved one. It was a very difficult experience for them since their loved one was active in family, church and civic events. There was a real void in their lives. Two weeks or so later that same family presented a new child for the Sacrament of Baptism in the same parish church where they had buried their loved one. They were awestruck at the connection revealed through the sacramental and liturgical prayers that were prayed during the Rites of Christian Burial and during the rite of Baptism. The Christian life is ordered not toward physical death, but our faith helps us to understand our life as being fixed onto eternal life.

Conversion is at the heart of Christian Discipleship. God's revelation is made manifest to us often through our parents & grandparents, sponsors, priests, religious sisters, catechists and a whole host of others: Ordinary People called to be Extraordinary in living daily life. Our response to God's revelation begins the disciples' journey. As we continue through the years different situations are encountered. A response is often required. We draw from our understanding of what is right and wrong. This sense of choosing accompanies us throughout our lives. As we turn away from sin and search for God's grace we continue to grow in holiness. These choices, the fruit of personal and liturgical prayer, help us to develop a strong moral character. The moral person is keenly aware of their own faults and failings relying on God's unconditional love along the way.

This weekend the passages proclaimed from sacred scripture set before us Jesus who is the giver of the "new" resurrection and the Sadducees who embody a certain type of religious fundamentalism rooted in the Mosaic Law. Whenever we venture into the realm of that which cannot be proven by empirical data or scientific study people tend to become uneasy. Death, other than paying income taxes, perhaps,

is among the most basic experience of all human persons regardless of race, creed etc Belief in something after physical death was not widespread at the time of Jesus in the ancient world. And so, for Jesus to proclaim the resurrection of the body as a gift from the father and the destiny of his followers was testing the collective consciousness of his own disciples as well as the Sadducees. What does it mean for us to be raised from the dead?

Our society, in some ways, is not much more advanced than the Sadducees of Jesus' time. When confronted with the unexplainable there is a natural tendency to grasp for that which can be proven and stray from all other possibilities. We see this in the way in which we understand death as something to be feared as the "end" rather than being "birthed" into the life of heaven our destiny. Throughout the centuries we have handed over dying and death to institutions: hospitals, care centers, funeral homes and others in order to keep this inevitable reality at a distance. We tend to understand the death of a loved one as an end to life rather than the beginning of new life.

The Catholic Church teaches us that we are "justified by faith". That is, we are saved through sacramental baptism. The discipleship that follows is our response to God for this awesome gift of salvation. The on-going conversion that characterizes the Christian Moral Life is our life-long response to God's gift of salvation. We do not "do good and avoid evil" in order to "be more saved". The manner in which we live our lives advances us on the way to being born into eternal life as we experience physical death. We have become united with Christ through a like death so that we might also be united with him through a like resurrection.

Our faith in the resurrection comes from God, who has loved us, and accompanies us throughout our life. Our understanding of resurrection does not come from proof texting or some narrow theological or philosophical view. When we as Christian Disciples strive to live in accord with what has been revealed to us through personal prayer, liturgical prayer, participation in the sacramental life, and the witness of others, then we are living in this world for God who is both the source of our beginning and our conclusion in this life. Therefore, we are a people of hope who are constantly being "readied" for the resurrection of the body at the end of time. Death is not an end but the beginning of a deeper communion with the God who has claimed us as his own.

The Year of Faith offers us an opportunity to reflect on the Gift of Baptism, the call to on-going conversion and the importance for us to be with our family members and friends as they deal with end of human life issues. Death is not the end. For the catholic, death is another beginning.