

SCREEN: The Good Place image

ME: Back in the summer I was having lunch with a friend and she asked me, *“Have you seen The Good Place?”*

The Good Place? No, what’s that?

“It’s a TV sitcom about the afterlife. You have to watch it!”

So I did. I binge-watched three seasons on vacation.

Anybody watch The Good Place?

For those of you who haven’t, here’s the basic premise:

the main character is Eleanor Shellstrop.

One day she wakes up and is greeted by Michael

who tells her that she has died and is now in ‘the good place’.

But Eleanor knows there's been some mistake because she wasn't good; she lived her life on earth thinking only about herself.

She doesn’t deserve to be in the good place.

Funny, right?

Now, to be clear, the good place in the show isn’t heaven.

For one thing, there’s no God.

There are angels and demons and a vast army of accountants who watch the actions of every person on earth and assign point values to what they say and do.

Reach the magic number and you make it into the good place.

So definitely not heaven, which we enter because of the merciful love of Jesus Christ.

What I like about the show is that it raises some pretty deep questions about life and death, sin and redemption, good and evil.

And I think it’s popular because lots of people struggle with these questions.

WE: So what do you think heaven will look like?

Pearly gates, fluffy clouds, angels with wings?

Who will you see there?

What'll you do there?

How do you get in?

If you have these questions, you're not alone.

SCREEN: Good News main screen

This is week two of our message series titled, Good News.

To briefly review from last week,

the good news we're talking about is God sending
his Son Jesus to save us.

It was something brand new - had never happened before in the history of the world.

God's original plan, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden

was that we would never have to think about death -

never struggle with sin or drudgery or hard work.

Then Adam and Eve disobeyed God and everything changed.

They wandered away from God then his Chosen People did,
again and again.

So God sent his Son Jesus to find us and lead us to heaven.

Jesus's message was,

"Be my follower and we'll live together forever."

This good news is meant for everyone - for you and me -

and God's good news must change us; change everything about us.

During his three year ministry on earth,

Jesus met lots of people who had questions about heaven,

like those in today's Gospel.

Let's see how he answered them.

SCREEN: blank red background

GOD: So today we heard that Jesus was debating with
a group of people called the Sadducees.

They were devout Jews who followed the commandments,
but they didn't believe in heaven or in the resurrection of the dead.
So, it's odd that they posed this bizarre question to Jesus
about a woman who had seven husbands
and the predicament it will cause when she gets to heaven.
Odd because the Sadducees don't believe in heaven!
What they really wanted was to trap Jesus,
trip him up, so the crowds wouldn't follow him.
But they failed.

Jesus's response made it absolutely clear that
there is a heaven where God lives and that the dead will rise
and be with him forever.

SCREEN: Good news: this life is not the end.

God will raise us from the dead.

YOU: So here's the good news for us: this life is not the end.
God will raise us from the dead.

There is so much confusion today about death.
Lots of strange ideas and lots of conflicting beliefs.
From the popularity of some movies and TV shows,
I think more people believe in zombies than heaven.

To cut through the confusion, let me share with you
what we believe as Catholic Christians about death and the afterlife.

SCREEN: two final destinations: heaven or hell

For every human, there are only two final destinations heaven or hell.
But we believe that most people will spend time in Purgatory.
Purgatory has gotten a bad rap.

People think it's a place of punishment but it's not.
We should think of Purgatory as a good place,
because someone who dies and goes to Purgatory is on their way to heaven.

SCREEN: those in purgatory are on their way to heaven

Now a good way to picture Purgatory is to think of it as a car wash for souls.

Yes, you heard me right: a car wash for souls.

Purgatory removes any attraction to sin we die with so we can be with God in heaven, pure and spotless.

So November began with a holy day for Catholics:

All Saints Day.

SCREEN: saints are already in heaven

The message of All Saints Day is that the saints are those who are already in Heaven.

How did they become saints?

Well, it wasn't by earning a certain number of points.

No, the saints saw their faith as a gift to be lived and shared with others every day.

And they did it in such extraordinary ways

that the Church says to all of us: do what they did:

follow their example so you'll go to heaven and be a saint.

That's right, in heaven we won't be angels, but saints.

Angels don't have bodies like us and never will.

SCREEN: our bodies will be reunited with our souls

But we believe that at his Second Coming,

Jesus will reunite our physical bodies with our souls.

This is one reason why our faith teaches us to respect our own bodies, and to treat with respect the remains of those who've died.

For example, it's why the Church permits cremation,

but says that the ashes should be buried or interred in sacred ground.

It's a sign of respect for the gift of the body and a way of honoring the person who died.

November for Catholics is the month of All Souls.

Sitting on the corner of the altar is a packet of envelopes

which parishioners filled out listing the names of their loved ones who have died.

The Masses this month are offered for them.

And I want to invite you, if you have not already done so,
to fill out an envelope with your loved one's names.

You'll find envelopes at the exits.

Fill one out and leave it at the info desk.

SCREEN: we pray for those who have died

Catholics pray for the dead at every Mass, not just in November.

Now, why do we do that?

First, praying for them is an act of gratitude -

we're thanking them for helping to make us who we are.

We are grateful to the parent or family member who loved us.

The friend who stood by us.

The teacher, the coach, the priest or religious who inspired us.

So first, praying for them is an act of gratitude.

Our prayers also help those who've died move more quickly through Purgatory
on their way to heaven.

See, our relationships don't end with death -

we remain connected to our loved ones forever.

Our faith tells us they are still with us, simply dwelling in another place.

One day we will see them again.

Until that day, I encourage you to honor and pray for them
and ask them to pray for you.

I hope all this talk about death hasn't upset you.

The goal is just the opposite; to share the good news
and to give you hope for yourself and others.

This past week, our Holy Father Pope Francis was speaking
with a group of young people and said
you have to think about death to truly appreciate life.

He also said that death reminds us that while earthly life comes to an end,

death does not have the last word for us who believe.

Pope Francis was reminding us of Jesus's good news in today's Gospel:

this life is not all there is. God will raise us up.

Raise us all up.

Today we heard Jesus rebuke the Sadducees by saying:

God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

He is also the God of our loved ones who've died.

If Jesus spoke those words to us today,

he could just have easily said:

God is the God of my dad, of your mom, of my aunt, your cousin, our friends.

You know, death is hard on those who survive.

The one who has passed away is heading to a better place.

It can be hard for us to believe that, but it is true and is what our faith teaches.

I actually have a favorite poem about death.

It's titled, *Death is Nothing At All*.

It was written in 1910 by Henry Scott-Holland,

who was a priest at St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

He delivered his poem in a sermon at a funeral.

It is shared at many funerals because it gives

comfort to those who grieve but also expresses what we believe.

It's written from the perspective of the one who died.

So I'll close by sharing part of his poem with you.

If you want to read the full text,

you can download this message from our website.

SCREEN: Death is nothing at all.

It does not count.

I have only slipped away into the next room.

Whatever we were to each other, that we are still.

Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.

Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?

SCREEN: I am but waiting for you, for an interval,
somewhere very near, just round the corner.

All is well. Nothing is hurt; nothing is lost.

One brief moment and all will be as it was before.

How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting when we meet again!

So today's good news is that there really is a heaven and when we get there
we will experience God's original plan for us.

We will have new and better bodies, there will be no shame,
no sin, no death only eternal life.

And until that day, we can live our lives without fear;
we can be courageous and hopeful because of Christ's promises
and all that awaits us in the kingdom of heaven. Amen. +

Death is Nothing at All (full text) by Henry Scott-Holland

Death is nothing at all.

It does not count.

I have only slipped away into the next room.

Nothing has happened.

Everything remains exactly as it was.

I am I, and you are you,

and the old life that we lived so fondly together is untouched, unchanged.

Whatever we were to each other, that we are still.

Call me by the old familiar name.

Speak of me in the easy way which you always used.

Put no difference into your tone.

Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes that we enjoyed together.

Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.

Let my name be ever the household word that it always was.

Let it be spoken without an effort, without the ghost of a shadow upon it.

Life means all that it ever meant.

It is the same as it ever was.

There is absolute and unbroken continuity.

What is this death but a negligible accident?

Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?

I am but waiting for you, for an interval,

somewhere very near,

just round the corner.

All is well.

Nothing is hurt; nothing is lost.

One brief moment and all will be as it was before.

How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting when we meet again!