

[Readings: Wisdom 3:1-9; Psalm 23; Romans 6:3-9; John 6:37-40]

There is nothing that will cause more labor and weariness than sin. It makes us weak and almost helpless. Jesus offers the best rest which is forgiveness. Jesus summons the sinner to conversion.

It becomes harder when one dies with the sin. But God can still save us. God's mercy can still be availed of. We believe in the existence of Purgatory. It is a state where souls who are still unworthy of Heaven undergoes cleansing through suffering.

The Communion of Saints, which we profess in the Creed, tells us that we, the living here on earth, the saints who are in Heaven, and the poor souls who are in Purgatory are connected and can help each other in prayer. That is why we offer masses for those who are in Purgatory. We are encouraged to do it. We thank those who never forget to pray for those souls.

This is an expression of our faith in God who is merciful. As Jesus promised to His Father, "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day." (John 6:39). True to His promise and obedience to His Father, He saved everyone, sinner or saint, when He died on the cross. All Creation is God's. He loves each and every one of us. His offering of His only begotten Son to die for us is a testimony to it.

Recalling the death of our loved ones, we are confronted with a perhaps startling reality, that we too shall die. That our life has bounds marked all about by birth and thus also by death. There was a time when we were not on this earth, and there will come a time when we are not again of this earth. And it is part of our vocation as Christians, I believe, to proclaim the reality of death itself.

*Memento mori* --"remember that you must die" -- is not simply a medieval invention but is a central focus of Holy Scripture. For to proclaim death as a central part of our human existence (that we have an ending as we have a beginning) is to be reminded that we are creatures. And if we are creatures, then to proclaim this in proclaiming the reality of death is to proclaim God, the Supreme Creator. That's what we hear in today's Second Reading.

And so we are called to serve God in our own generation. As our loved ones did in theirs and to which their lives bear witness even (especially!) if they do so imperfectly. To fear God is to know who God is -- and to know who we are as His creatures -- and such fear is articulated in a life that is marked not necessarily by moral perfection but by reverence, a pilgrimage towards God.

And where have our loved ones gone now that they have reached the threshold of their pilgrimage here on earth? We do not know. We do not know where they have gone, nor where we will go when we too die. For even though Christians have spoken much about Heaven and Hell and dreamed up all sorts of images of their reality, the truth is that the threshold of death opens us up to something that must stay hidden from us now and about which we cannot say much.

"But the souls of the just, the righteous are in the hand of God..." we hear in our First Reading. To be confronted by the reality of the threshold of death is to freely entrust ourselves into the hands of God, or to attempt to withhold ourselves from that which will take us anyway. Whatever the case, it is to enter into a reality from which we cannot run.

And yet the Scriptures attest to another reality that we CAN know something about. That just here, in death, God Himself has crossed the limits of our creaturely lives from His own side (from eternity) and has moved toward us in the nothingness of death. And where else is this made possible but in the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming again of Jesus Christ our Lord? "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day," we hear in today's Gospel. Lose nothing, not even to the nothingness of death, because into this very nothingness Jesus himself entered as He lay in the tomb for three days and through this nothingness, He went in the victory of the Resurrection!

And it is just here, to the awesome reality of resurrected life, that Christ will bring with and in Himself all the faithful departed and those of us faithful pilgrims with them: "This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son

and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day," (John 6:40).

Their hope is full of immortality, Wisdom tells us (Wisdom 3:4) and it is this very same hope, a living hope, that we have been born into through our baptism into the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3). A hope that St. Peter tells us is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. That is, not a creaturely hope. A salvation that will be revealed on that last day but which we, along with the faithful departed, are receiving even now in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:9). And every time we share in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

So let us rejoice even as we face various trials in our life, and let us pray for those of our loved ones who have departed this life in faith, and for ourselves as well, that the good work which God did begin in them -- and has begun in us -- may be perfected unto the day of Jesus Christ. God's mercy and compassion, hopefully will be enough for us to endure and accept our suffering for the sake of being worthy to enter the Kingdom.

On this day/night, offer a prayer for the souls in Purgatory. Think of the positive memories. Remember those who helped you grow in faith and in your practice of the faith. Give praise to God for His mercy. And never lose hope!

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. May their souls and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. AMEN!