

PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS
THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME (C)

9 – 10 NOVEMBER 2019

"It is because of the resurrection that Christianity exists. To be a Christian, one must, in fact, believe in the resurrection, both the resurrection of Jesus himself and the resurrection of his followers, the members of the Jesus movement." ...Brian Gleeson



SUNDAY REFLECTION

There is an inexorable human tendency to speculate about what happens or may happen after we die. This is often expressed in a nagging sense that life on earth is somehow incomplete. Human desire reaches to the infinite, something St. Thomas Aquinas recognized in one of his sermons: 'People expend great effort in their life, but compared to their desires, what they accomplish is not much.'

In the Christian vision, all thinking about God's offer of further life for people centers on Christ. On the cross He is aware that He is not dying into nothingness, but into a new kind of world, His Kingdom. Hans Kung applies this to every human death: 'When we attain our eschaton, the absolutely final point in this life, what is waiting for us? Not nothing ... Death is a passing into God, a homecoming into God's mystery, and an assumption into God's glory.' (Eternal Life) Theologian Thomas F. O'Mears, O.P., is worth citing: 'The Risen Christ sends out directly to each man and woman when they died a power stronger than death; He is a channel of divine power reaching into the futures of all.' (Life beyond Death)

Blaise Pascal, the famous French mathematician and philosopher, is said to have had a near-death experience when his horse-drawn carriage ploughed over the parapet of a bridge in Paris. Pascal took some time to recover, and when he did come round he had an intense religious experience. For him, as he wrote in a note found after his death, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, was no longer the God of the philosophers and scholars but the God of Jesus Christ to whom thereafter he felt inexorably drawn.

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob is our living God. Pascal believed that he would never be 'cut off from Him', if he lived out the Gospel message. Living the Gospel day in day out must be our priority, too, as we make our way through life, as we celebrate the good times, striving perhaps to come to terms with shattering and traumatic experiences or simply coping with life today with all its ups and downs. Living the Gospel may often be a struggle but it is a struggle full of hope and promise.

STEWARDSHIP: In today's second reading, St. Paul prays that the Thessalonians may be strengthened "in every good deed and word." May we, too, be strengthened and empowered to use our time and talents for the good of others.

Herman Melville

“Hope is the struggle of the soul, breaking loose from what is perishable, and attesting her eternity.”

READINGS FOR THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY

17 NOV '19

Mal. 3:19-20: The prophet Malachi announces the arrival of a day on which the Lord will judge Israel, destroying the unrighteous and glorifying the righteous.

2 Thes. 3:7-12: Paul exhorts his readers to avoid idleness and to work, following his example.

Lk. 21:5-19: Jesus announces the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, exhorting His disciples to persevere in their suffering for His sake.

St. Justin Martyr

“God postpones the collapse and dissolution of the universe (through which the bad angels, the demons, and men would cease to exist), because of the Christian seed, which He knows to be the cause in nature of the world’s preservation.”

ADDITIONAL MASSES THIS WEEK

11 Nov. Monday Veterans Day Mass 8:30 A.M.

14 Nov. Thursday Mass of Remembrance 6:30 P.M.

NOVEMBER: I have to admit that this is a rather ambiguous title for this section. Why rely on the name of a month as the introduction of this as well as other discussions in the next few meanderings?

In a very real sense this month of November serves as a transition period. From a seasonal perspective we may be aware of a transition into Fall. Of course here in Tidewater that can change in the next hour. From the perspective of holidays we move rapidly from Halloween to Thanksgiving and into the busy seasons of Christmas and New Year; and ever more frequently we find one leap-frogging over the other as far as the retail community is concerned.

But for us Catholics there is, or can be another transitional reality that we are invited to enter into one that is a spiritual/religious transition. This month with its feasts leads us from one Church year into a new one beginning with Advent. At the beginning we had the Feast of All Saints and the Feast of the Faithful Departed and at the end of November we celebrate the important feast of Christ the King.

If I truly pay attention to these feasts and what underpins them to the scripture readings that are presented then as well as throughout the thirty days of November; how am I challenged? Challenged in the reality of my commitment to Jesus Christ is he literally “King” the center, the focus of my life, the reason for my existence and identity. Do the initial feast that opened up the month cause me to seriously consider my position in the Mystical Body of Christ and my relationship to all who comprise that membership.

As I gradually move away from All Saints and All Souls Days, as I gather with you on this Thursday evening, 14 Nov. for a Mass of Remembrance of Our Departed, do I recognize that I

am embracing the idea that the Creating Father desires the salvation of all through the grace of Jesus Christ's Passion and Death. But that this also requires that we embrace that grace so as to truly move forward in reforming our lives, eliminating our sins, whatever their context and truly being purified so as to stand in the presence of God.

In this month of the Faithful Departed let us address one term that is a significant debating point between Catholics and Protestants as between different elements in the Church. The dreaded word, PURGATORY. (Fortunately I'm celebrating only one Mass this weekend because I have no doubt that there will be a handful of individuals at the doors of the church arguing that purgatory is no longer a teaching of the Church and they will use the gossamer claim that the "Spirit of Vatican II" does not endorse this concept. This is the same argument that has been used over the past 60 years to foist any and every sort of banality on the faithful. If we want to explore the true meaning of the Spirit of Vatican II we need to study the words of the actual documents.

Now on to purgatory, figuratively speaking.

For not a few devout Catholics prayer for the dead is a matter of "freeing the soul from purgatory." There's something to that, and it's certainly good practice to pray for those who have died, but sometimes it seems that the idea of "purgatory" (meaning the purification of those who have died before they can enter the presence of God) gets mixed up with the idea of prison: that it's a place, and that its purpose is punishment. Well, not necessarily so.

Our church teaches that "all who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned." (CCC, 1030-1) Notice the emphasis on *process*, not *place*. And notice that the process is "entirely different" from punishment.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, before he was elected pope, wrote a book that had some interesting things to say about this teaching. Here's a crucial bit:

Purgatory is not...some kind of supra-worldly concentration camp where one is forced to undergo punishments in a more or less arbitrary fashion. Rather it is the inwardly necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God [i.e., capable of full unity with Christ and God] and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints. Simply to look at people with any degree of realism at all is to grasp the necessity of such a process. ...What actually saves is the full assent of faith. But in most of us, that basic option is buried under a great deal of wood, hay and straw. Only with difficulty can it peer out from behind the latticework of an egoism we are powerless to pull down with our own hands. Man is the recipient of the divine mercy, yet this does not exonerate him from the need to be transformed. Encounter with the Lord is this transformation. It is the fire that burns away our dross and re-forms us to be vessels of eternal joy.

– Josef Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (1988)

In short, Cardinal Ratzinger's (as he was then) view is that the encounter with Christ at our death is itself what purifies us – “Encounter with the Lord is the transformation. It is the fire that burns away our dross and re-forms us to be vessels of eternal joy.”

Here's a summary of the teaching of another great twentieth-century theologian, the German Jesuit Karl Rahner:

Rahner...attempted to combine Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox teaching on the place of the soul between death and resurrection. Instead of concentrating on what he saw as the over-individualized concern with the fate of a particular soul, he supposed that after death the soul becomes more closely united with the cosmos as a whole, through which process, while still awaiting the resurrection, the soul becomes more aware of the effects of its own sin on the world in general. This, he suggested, would be purgatory enough.

– N. T. Wright, *For All the Saints? Remembering the Christian Departed* (2003)

So as we remember and pray for all those who have died, especially today, we can take comfort in the teaching of our church about them (and about our own future). Keeping our hope based on Christ, we have nothing to fear.



Purgatory

- **2 Maccabees 12:42-46 - Pray for the dead**
- **Baruch 3:4 - Baruch asks the Lord to hear the prayers of the dead of Israel. Prayers for the dead are unnecessary in heaven and unnecessary in hell. These dead are in purgatory**

SAINT OF THE WEEK: MARGARET of SCOTLAND 1045-1093 16 NOV

Queen of Scotland and model of charity. The daughter of Prince Edward d' Outremer, the Exile, and a German princess, Agatha, she was raised in the court of King St. Stephen of Hungary (r. 997-1038). At twelve she went to the court of King St. Edward the Confessor (r. 1042-1066) but fled to Scotland in 1066 following the Battle of Hastings. There King Malcolm III (r. 1057-1093) gave her and her family shelter. She married Malcolm in 1070 at Dumfermline Castle. Known for piety and generosity, she died at Edinburgh Castle on November 16, after learning that her husband and sons had been slain in battle by rebels attacking Alnwick Castle and Edinburgh. She was canonized in 1250 and declared patroness of Scotland in 1673.

PRAYERS

Prayers for the Faithful Departed

O God, the Creator and Redeemer of all the faithful, grant to the souls of Thy servants departed the remission of their sins, that, through pious supplications, they may obtain the pardon which they have always desired. Who livest and reignest with God the Father, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, world without end.

Amen.

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



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