

Second Hand Preacher 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time 11 12 17

1Thessalonians 4:13-18

Death is something that makes most people uncomfortable. There is so much that we don't know about what happens to our soul at the point of death. This is one of the great mysteries. Science has figured out what happens to our bodies, but there is uncertainty about a soul we can't see. Some may argue that at the point of death we exist no more and that is truly the end. We as Christians believe that there is something more. That scripture and Tradition hold that there is life after death. That what seems to be the end is actually the beginning. The field of hospice fascinates me. I believe that these special people care for the dying and help the survivors prepare for a new reality. Death is something that can be hard to talk about because there is an ending of what happens in this life. We develop relationships in this life we hold dear. We wonder about relationships in the great beyond.

St. Paul preaches about this very subject. There is a strong indication that the Christians in Thessalonica struggled with the concept of death. This would be especially true about those who were killed because of their faith. Being Christian was a big risk and the faithful felt so strongly about their faith that they were willing to die. I'm sure most of the Thessalonians knew someone who had given their life. They also knew that losing their life on earth would be a reality. Paul softens what happened to the believers when he tells them that their loved ones are falling asleep. This is because Paul believes that those who have committed their lives to Christ will rise again. He gives the Christians hope that the dead will rise on the last day. Paul and all Christians of his time period believed that the last day would be in their lifetime. Paul reassures this community that death is not an end.

We are getting close to the end of the Church's liturgical year. In two weeks, we will celebrate Christ the King and Ordinary time will be over. Advent will ring in the next liturgical year. This week's second reading from Paul's letter is critical to our understanding of the next life to come. We pray about the life promised to those who believe. As a priest, I pray the Liturgy of the Hours. This is a series of prayers that mark time for people of faith to pray at different hours of the day. This is mostly done by clergy and religious, but anyone can take part in this powerful form of prayer. One of the hours is called the Office of Readings that is supposed to begin the day. There is a hymn and three psalms that begin this prayer. Then there is a passage of scripture and a reading from the Church's vast Tradition. This past week we have been reading from 2 Maccabees. This is a story of some brave warriors who take back the temple in Jerusalem so that the faith can continue. They lose many men in battle. The author brings up the concept of praying for the dead. The Church does this on November 2nd and really continues this in a big way all of November. We also do it throughout the years with intentions of the dead offered as a part of the Mass. The Mass is still the fulfillment of the Paschal Mystery, but we also remember those who have gone before us in faith. The rising from the dead on the last day is still an important part of our faith.