

## 32nd Sunday (C)

- Story about Evelyn who had a really tough life – abuse, mental illness & finally suffering with a cancer that would take her life – but became one of the wisest people I have ever met & she had a deep faith in God.
- Mary, a parishioner who was visiting her with communion in the final weeks of her life said to her that she did not believe in life after death.
- Evelyn asked me what I believed.
- It tested me, but I said that I wouldn't be doing what I was as a priest if I didn't. So I asked her what she believed.
- This was her response: *"There is nothing in which I am more certain, because after all that I have been through in my life, & the way I have experienced God to be with me in all that, I know that it is not going to come to nothing. I know that I am going to be with the God who has been my friend through all my life."*
- I thought about the conversation between Mary, Evelyn & me, & I came to the conclusion that you simply cannot be Christian & not believe in life after death – the Christian message has no real value other than that of any benevolent humanitarian ethos of making this world a better place if it's not directed by a vision of a fullness of life that God invites us into beyond this life.
- Life after death & the resurrection of the body is part & parcel of our Christian faith, but we don't know how to visualise this.
- That's the reason that there are so many jokes about it – you know the ones about what St. Peter asks at the pearly gates & what happens after we give our replies.
- Because life beyond this life is beyond our understanding of anything we know; only images, stories, parables, metaphors & analogies are used to either explain this life beyond death, or to mock it, or joke about it.
- But none of the parables or images used even by Jesus, or by the Church since then, is meant to be taken literally.
- Whether it be talk of banquets, wedding feasts, or fire & brimstone, they are all things we know something about to convey something about a reality we don't adequately know.
- Of course, some images have been used to ridicule the notion of life after death – to portray it literally & in a way that renders it ridiculous.
- Today's Gospel presents such a portrayal – it's a story invented by the Sadducees (who didn't believe in the resurrection & life after death) to make Jesus side with the Pharisees, who did believe.
- Now they come to Jesus with a kind of case story that ridiculed the way the Pharisees reasoned when they tried to find answers to complicated questions.

- The case they present concerns 7 brothers, who, after the previous ones die, subsequently marry the same woman, & in the end, all 7 die without leaving children. Finally the woman herself dies. Now, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since she's married each one?
- Jesus offers 2 answers. The first is this:
- Life in the hereafter is of a different nature from life on earth – it is in another dimension & marriage belongs to *this* earthly dimension of reality.
- In marriage & family life we learn & practise love & living in relationships.
- By saying this, Jesus upturns any materialistic, self-centred images that we may have about life after death – we can't take with us any material goods.
- Jesus then gives a 2<sup>nd</sup> answer to the Sadducees.
- By referring back to other instances in the O.T. where God is asserted as the God of life, Jesus reasons that God does not abandon what God has made, cherished & loved, & that therefore, God cannot be a God of the dead, but of the living.
- The future of people beyond death is anchored in the life of a Creator who doesn't intend annihilation, but completion & life – this was the whole message of the life, death & resurrection of Jesus.
- But faith in life after death runs into trouble also in our day.
- For many people today, life ends with death and a belief that there is no hereafter – life ending with death & annihilation can render life itself rather meaningless & particularly sad & futile especially if much of what a person experienced is great suffering.
- It is like the Sadducees ridiculing Jesus' belief in life beyond this life because they don't accept the literal explanation and they're unprepared to accept that life beyond this life is radically different.
- We are called to live by a standard that holds life and relationships to be sacred because we have a destiny which we believe is God's greater plan for all created order.
- We spend a great deal of our lives waiting, hoping & longing for one thing or another, but our faith assures us that this life & world can never fulfil our deepest yearnings, hopes & desires – only God can do that.
- Hope is a vital part of the Christian life – a belief that things can be better & different because God intended better – it's God's vision for which we strive - What food does for the body, hope does for our deepest selves.
- The prospect & promise of eternal life should make a difference to the way we live this life; our vision, our dreams of the future effect the way we live life now & influence the effort we put into striving for values that are eternal, & the choices we make in the now have eternal ramifications.
- How can our belief in the life God promises affect me in the way I live today?