

Homily for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 9-10, 2019

Readings: 2 Maccabees 7:1-2,9-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5; Luke 20:27-38

Preacher: Sr. Karen Dietz

Fascination with the afterlife has been with us for a very long time. The readings given to us today certainly bear that out. Popular television programs like *Touched by an Angel* and *God Friended Me* as well as movies like *Heaven Can Wait* and *Ghost* attempt to explain what is truly unexplainable. An Amazon search for books on life after death reveals page after page of titles about the experiences of children, adults, physicians and scientists, trying to express the reality of the “next life.”

The first reading from the Book of Maccabees is a scriptural attempt to explain what we take on faith. Coupled with the attempt to better describe heaven is the effort to make sense of human suffering. Suffering and death are two realities we cannot avoid. And yet, they make little sense to us.

A simple construct of the human experience consists of birth, living a life and dying at an acceptable time. The introduction of pain, sorrow, illness and emotional distress is a most unwelcome interruption in what we hope will be the “normal” course of things. And yet, in every life that is lived with intention, reflection and connection, the presence of sorrow and pain is inevitable, even ordinary.

As Christians, we understand this ebb and flow to be our participation in the paschal mystery; that experience of Christ breaking into our world as one of us, living a faithful life, suffering to the point of death and rising from the dead. We also know well that our call as Christians is to participate in this mystery with Jesus as our guide. This is what it means to be a disciple. And we have firsthand knowledge of birth and life-and-death experiences, but the resurrection remains uncharted territory.

The questions asked by the Sadducees in the Gospel reading are yet another example of the human desire to explain that which we cannot see or have not yet

experienced. As I listen to the questions, I am reminded of long car rides with my nephew. We would move erratically from whatever he was working on in school at that time to a conversation he overheard to the beauty of the drive, etc. When a child asks question after question of a trusted adult, I believe she is trying to understand the world around her. This curiosity, when nurtured and encouraged, makes for a more knowledgeable person and one who can more easily negotiate all the stages of growing up.

Perhaps the same is true when it comes to human nature's curiosity about life after death and the meaning of suffering. The more we explore by taking our questions and thoughts on these issues to trusted friends, ministers or counselors, the more we come to understand what it means to be a person of faith. This healthy spiritual curiosity strengthens our relationship with God and others and deepens our sense of self. Our faith is made stronger when we are willing and able to seek meaning in our lives and our world.

In my nephew's younger years, his questions were never ending. There was always something more to be curious about and a new question to be voiced. His desire for knowledge and understanding was insatiable. At times, I could become weary of this constant probing.

The same can be said of our journey to God. I fear we lose some of that unquenchable thirst as we get older. We can become impatient when our questions only lead to more questions. Finding "closure" or resolution is more important than our curiosity. Do not give in to the very human desire to wrap it all up and tie it with a bow! I do not believe that is how faith works.

The reading from Saint Paul to the Thessalonians says as much: "May Jesus who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace, encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good deed." This is not an exhortation to a task completed. This is a prayer for all believers to be encouraged and strengthened for the journey ahead—wherever it leads.

We are fast approaching the end of the liturgical year. The scriptures each year at this time call us to reflect on the gift of life everlasting, even if incomprehensible.

It is also the month of All Saints and Souls. Let us remember those who have completed their earthly journey and thank God for their faith and their willingness to be models of what it means to be a lifelong disciple, a seeker of God forever.