

Homily for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 Year C

November is the month of the Holy Souls. Throughout the month, in its Liturgies, the Church focuses upon the mystery of death, and our own personal death in particular. In doing this its purpose is not to fill us with fear, but to allow us to come to terms with a reality that can deeply enrich our lives.

Everyone of us here today, young or old, is going to die one day, and so it is very important that we come to terms with, and be at peace with, what sometimes is a subject of fear, fear of the unknowable and the unknown.

For me there is one line in the Responsorial Psalm of today's readings that could be a very powerful help when we each have to face that abyss of the unknown, "When I awake I shall be filled with the sight of your glory."

When I awake - one way that a lot of people look at death (and this is a way that engenders a lot of sadness) is that it is seen as a process of decline, of closing down, the faculties failing, and slipping into a sort of darkness and oblivion, the eyes close and that is it.

But those words, "When I awake", can offer a totally different viewpoint.

Why shouldn't we regard the moment of our death as the most intense experience of waking up? We do not sink into darkness and gloom, but the eyes of our soul simply open up, and we are bathed in the most beautiful light of God's Truth and Glory.

Like waking from a dream, we will see clearly for the very first time. We move from life as we know it, to the fullness of life as it has been promised to us.

Like the Responsorial Psalm says, it is a joyful instant in which we are blinded, dazzled, mesmerised, and intoxicated by the Glory of God. There is no sadness and no pain. It is a moment of the most profound healing and change, when the caterpillars that we were, metamorphose into the butterflies that we were always meant to be.

How we look at something determines an awful lot of how we cope with and relate to things. And that is very true about death and beyond, the Resurrection. We can scare ourselves, depress ourselves, and cause ourselves an awful lot of unnecessary pain if we cannot break free of the habit of looking at death in a particular way, as the decline, degeneration, separation and parting, judgement, and punishment.

Nobody knows what death and beyond is like. "The eye hasn't seen, nor the ear heard", so why shouldn't we turn the whole thing upside down and allow ourselves to look at it in a totally different way. We should view death with images and ideas that console and strengthen us, so that as we draw near to it we can do so with loving anticipation and peaceful resignation.

It is God's wonderful surprise for us. We believe death is not the end, but it is the beginning. It is not to be feared but it is to be embraced.

However, we have become conditioned to fear the unknown and the unknowable by the language and pictures we have received to describe it. We have fallen into a trap, and this is a very difficult trap to struggle free from.

We begin that struggle for change by overcoming our fear and telling ourselves it is OK not to be afraid. Then, by choosing words, ideas and images that console us and fill us with courage and hope, we can work and build upon them throughout our lives. We can forge a completely new understanding of our deaths, so that as it approaches all the fear is driven out and we face it with loving anticipation.

We are going to wake up as if it were for the very first time and be filled with the sight of God's Glory.