THIRTY SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME. 2026

St. Paul, in today's second reading, a lesson from chapter 14 of First Thessalonians, urges his leaders and listeners not to be afraid of death. How is it possible not to be afraid of death? Faith makes that possible, specifically Faith in Jesus Christ, the Conqueror of Death. The Lord Jesus Christ truly died on the Cross for our deliverance from sin, and truly rose from the dead, for our deliverance from death. He rose not just for Himself, far from it. He rose for all who would, through Faith and Faith's good works, belong to Him. Thus, we shall always be with the Lord. St. Paul encourages us, walking as we sometimes do through the valley of the shadow of death, to console each other with the promise of victory over death through our union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are all going to die someday. That really isn't news to anyone, but we do live in a civilization that hates to talk about that. There is a river that all must cross, but our civilization doesn't want anyone to learn how to cross the river and not drown in it.

Since the Lord Jesus Christ is sovereign now over death, He crosses back and forth at will. The best thing for us to do is let Him carry across the river of death. That means having a genuine relationship with the living Lord Jesus through Faith, trusting in His Gospel words "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Me, even though He die, yet shall He live." It also means receiving Him faithfully and lovingly in Holy Communion, trusting in His Gospel words, "Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood shall live forever." I used the appropriate passage from chapter six of St. John's Gospel that includes those words at the Funerals of both of my parents. Every time they received Holy Communion, they were preparing to cross the river by connecting themselves to Jesus Christ.

If that is true every time we receive Holy Communion faithfully, it is true especially with Holy Viaticum, Communion specifically for the dying. "He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day." (John 6:54). Every faithful Communion is a participation in Christ's passover from death to life. Holy Communion for the dying, or Viaticum, is a particularly powerful participation in that passover. Just as Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist, are the Sacraments that initiate someone into the full life of Christ's Church on earth, so Penance, Anointing of the Sick, and Viaticum, are the Sacraments by which the Church on earth turns a member over to the Church in Heaven. By Penance, Anointing of the Sick, and Holy Communion, the earthly Church solemnly entrusts a faithful member who is dying to the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, Who will carry that person safely across the river. Ideally, therefore, the Last Rites, meaning Penance, Anointing of the Sick, and Holy Communion as Viaticum, are given not immediately before death, but while the dying Catholic is able to confess in the Sacrament of Penance, consciously entrust himself to the Lord Jesus, and then receive Holy Communion for the dying. Naturally, circumstances often make that ideal impossible, and I and people's families and caregivers come as close as we can to that ideal in celebrating the Last Rite; but the ideal preparation for death remains the Sacraments of Penance, Anointing of the Sick, and Holy Communion.

Those of us who are not closely approaching death can prepare for it partly by celebrating Catholic Funerals well. In Catholic Funerals, we certainly pray for the deceased, but we also prepare ourselves for the day when we must cross the river ourselves.

There are three principal elements to a Catholic Funeral. The first is the Liturgy of the Word. The people who assemble for a Funeral should hear what the Lord, through the Sacred

Scriptures, has to say about death. Choosing Scriptural passages well is vital. Many people attending a Funeral have never heard much of the Sacred Scriptures, and this is an opportunity for them to hear the word of God that has power to save them. The priest who preaches has to be particularly careful with the homily. The instructions forbid us to make a speech about the deceased, a eulogy. The homily needs to say something about the deceased, of course, but the main point of the homily needs to be the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death. Dear old dad, feeling quite strongly about this, warned me that if I talked too much about him at his Funeral he would rise from the coffin and put a stop to that nonsense. While people at a Funeral need to hear something about the deceased, they need even more (whether they realize it or not) to hear about Jesus Christ, and how through union with Him there is victory over sin and death, not just at the end of our earthly lives but at this moment now.

The second principal element of a Catholic Funeral is the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In a few circumstances, there might be a good reason for not having a Mass, but, frankly, I have a hard time thinking of many. Did the deceased not go to Mass? Then there is all the more reason for invoking the power of Jesus Christ's Death and Resurrection upon that person. The Mass is the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ mystically made present. Everyone needs that. Except in dire and direly unusual circumstances, it should be part of every Catholic Funeral. In the Holy Eucharist the Risen Lord Jesus mystically visits His people to share His life with them. The deceased, his family, and his friends, are joined together by Jesus' Death and Resurrection, mystically made present in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. That bond cannot be broken by any power of heaven or earth. Let the demons run away howling from the presence of the Lamb that was slain and now lives forever! Let death itself tremble and bend the knee before Him, living and life giving in the Holy Eucharist! Let the People of God always entrust their departed brethren to the Lord with the offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

The third principal element of a Catholic Funeral is the commendation of the departed to God in a final farewell. This final farewell is a sort of kiss that the Church makes with incense and holy water. It is not a complete farewell, for all of the Faithful on both sides of the river are united in Jesus Christ. Neither is it a forever farewell, for Jesus Christ will bring all who belong to Him together in the Promised Land, leading them through the river dry shod. Still, it is a farewell, and a final kiss is fitting, a kiss made with Holy Water, incense, prayers, and shared memories.

"Praised be to you, my Lord, for our sister bodily death, from whom no living can escape," sang St. Francis of Assisi. He added, "Woe to those who die in mortal sin! But blessed are they who will be found in your most holy will, for the second death will not harm them." St. Francis of Assisi was a profoundly courageous man, brave enough to proclaim Jesus Christ to Cairo's Sultan el-Kamil. Francis, being the gentle soul he was, did not denounce Islam's prophet, as some medieval and modern people want to do. At the same time, he did proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord loudly and passionately, something that seems to embarrass a lot of modern people, including even some quite prominent church leaders, who really ought to know better. Knowing that Jesus Christ has conquered death, St Francis had both the courage and the charity to proclaim Him. May that be true of each one of us

I am the Resurrection and the Life, says the Lord; whoever ever believes in me, even though he die, yet shall he live.