Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deacon Walt | Full Homily Transcript

Life does not end in death; it only changes. We believe that all the ties of friendship and affection which knit us as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death. I speak these words in every funeral liturgy that I do. Today's readings also point to one other significant fact. That simply is this: what we do on this side of the grass makes a big difference for what happens to us on the other side of the grass.

Our readings today are winding down our current liturgical cycle, which is Cycle A. In a few weeks, we're gonna begin with Cycle B. Think Mark's Gospel. We do that with the season of Advent. As our current cycle comes to an end, the Scriptures we read become more eschatological in nature. That's a big word. Some of you may be wondering, what is eschatology?

Well, eschatology is defined as relating to death, judgment, and the final destination of the soul and humankind. It pertains to end things. Now, many of our fundamentalist brothers and sisters point to our second reading and call it the rapture, and understand that that's not exactly Catholic theology, nor is it mainline Christianity. So, what is this second reading pointing to?

Well, Paul is consoling Christians who were grieving their fellow believers who died. His point is that all of those who died in Christ will not be left behind. When the Lord comes, the dead in Christ will rise first, and then the living faithful will be caught up together with them to meet him. The passage ends with the promise that they will always be with the Lord, and with Paul's instruction to console one another with this hope.

Now, perhaps a quote from another piece of Scripture might help us. And this is, by the way, another reading that I typically will use in a funeral liturgy. Jesus said to his disciples, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself so that where I am, you may also be.'

You see, my friends, the same God that called you and myself into creation by name and knitted us together—think about that, knitted us together in our mother's womb—will one day welcome us home. In our society, we do everything possible to sanitize death.

In the last century, when someone died, they were often viewed in their homes before being taken to the cemetery. This is where the term wake comes from. You see, people would gather, tell stories, and say their final goodbyes to their loved ones. In fact, the noise would be so loud that they just might wake up the person if they truly weren't dead. Death was seen as a natural part of life.

Today, funerals are carried out at church or in funeral homes. And that's even if there is a funeral. A number of people today are often just having a graveside service. My friends, funerals and wakes are

more for the living than they are for the dead. It gives their surviving loved ones a chance to say goodbye.

If I could sum up our Gospel reading in just a few words, it would be: be watchful and overprepared. Our readings today direct us to not only make the right decisions, but to go one step further, to make ourselves known in anticipation for meeting the Lord. As the Psalm proclaimed, 'Our souls are thirsting for you, O Lord our God.'

We hear in our Gospel story, in our Gospel today, the story of ten virgins. Five are considered wise and five are considered foolish. Or perhaps another way might be to look at it like this: five were prepared, but five were overprepared.

The wise virgins, knowing the bridegroom may come at a later hour, expected and planned accordingly and brought extra oil with them. The foolish virgins didn't even consider bringing extra oil. When the bridegroom is spotted at midnight hour, the unprepared foolish virgins want the others to share their oil. But the wise virgins do not because there might not be enough oil for all of them. You see, the wise virgins, they were watchful and they were overprepared.

Now, we have a big celebration coming. It's just around the corner: Thanksgiving. You might have started to think about what your family meal will be like and what food you could be serving. Or if you're like my daughter-in-law, you've already started to set the table, inform all the guests what to bring, prepared the dishware you're to be using, and make sure everything is in its place. Now, in both instances, you're prepared, but in one example, you're overly prepared.

My friends, none of us know when our day or time will come to leave this earthly realm. I trust all of us here at Mass are trying to cross our T's and dot our I's to enter this heavenly realm. I once saw a funny bumper sticker. And it read, 'Jesus is coming soon. Look busy.'

Well, today's readings encourage us not to just look busy, but to prepare by going to church and trying to do what's right. But then we're called to go one step further and overly prepare by thirsting for our Lord, uniting our spirit with God's. And therein, I think, lies the lesson for each of us. Most of us will never know when our earthly journey is going to be over.

Our life could be over in an instant. Live each day as if it's your last. Tell people you love them, but go a step further and pray for them. Do what's right, not just some of the time, but all of the time, even when no one is looking. Pray endlessly, perhaps having a prayer every time you wash your hands.

Being watchful and overprepared means living your faith each day in such a way that others can see God's love in you and they in turn want to be like you. It means preaching the Gospel every day and only using words when necessary.

My prayer for all of us is that as this liturgical year comes to an end, we look forward to the season of Advent and Christmas. We do so by being watchful and overly prepared. We do so by not just going through the steps, but preparing our spirit for the birth of Christ coming into our world. Amen? Amen.