

Homily for the 32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

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By Nick Thompson

Death is an abrupt end to the only existence each of us have ever known but then again so was birth when all we had ever known was the womb. Who would you be willing to die for? Your mother, Father, Wife, Children, Friend, Stranger? John 15:13 states, *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”* Even if we were willing to die for someone, we would want to make sure that person was really worth the sacrifice, right? Yet, some like military personnel, as we approach Veterans Day and first responders, police officers, firefighters have become willing if need be to lay down their lives for others they don’t even know. Although it is not inevitable that they will die young, the risk comes with the job. However, as a rule they are not laying down their life for an individual, but for their country, for a way of life, for a cause. They are willing to die for what they believe in. They are willing to die for freedom, justice, law and order. They are willing to die so that future generations can be free and safe. The Greek philosopher Sophocles stated, *“It is easier to motivate people to die for a cause than for an individual.”*

The Second Book of Maccabees gives us an account of what happens when faith and hope in a loving God meets persecution by an unbelieving society. The story of the mother and her seven sons is an example of how endurance and hope in God can sustain us through the trials of mortal life. What was at stake for this mother and her sons? Eating of pork was regarded as renouncing the Levitical Law of God, committing apostasy and thereby accepting a false God. The choice of this mother and her sons was to give example to those still living of why faithfulness to God was more valuable than life. The people observing witnessed the faith of this magnificent eight and grew in their own faith. It was about God's command, and their identity as the people of God: *"We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors."* They faced persecution and even physical death courageously, to give witness to those who followed, witness to the certain hope they found in God's promise of eternal life, resurrection: *"It was heaven that gave me these limbs...from Him I hope to receive them again."* The lesson found in these heroic acts is that we must not be afraid of persecutions or hardships or even death for the sake of witnessing to our faith in Christ: *"The King of the world will raise us up to live again forever. It is for his laws that we are dying."* Rather we should let the hope we have in resurrection, in eternal life sustain us always in the way we live now thus professing our faith through action:

“Let us hold on unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” says (Heb 10:23).

And this promise we hope in is that Jesus gives and sustains life beyond the grave. He promises immortality either in heaven or hell for all, based on how we live and follow his laws. Paul reminds us in (1 Cor. 15:19) that: *“If our hope in Christ is only for this life, then we deserve more pity than anyone else.* Our hope must not end here because we are on a journey toward eternal life in Christ and our faith is measured in how we live out the time we have. Jesus died for you and me individually as well as for the whole of humanity. The reason, His love for each of us: *“Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole mind and your whole soul and Love your neighbor as yourself.”* Without love, our death, no matter how it might benefit others, profits us nothing in God’s eyes: *“and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:3). While the willingness to die for a belief, a conviction, or an ideal is noble, the greatest motive for giving our life is love: *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son”* (John 3:16). Jesus never stopped loving the ones who were crucifying Him. Unknown to them, He was hanging on that cross for them as well as us who were yet to be born.

Everyone will die sooner or later. Physical death is actually the easy part. The question is can we like Jesus die to ourselves even while

we live. The greatest challenge for us while we live is to die to self, to “die daily” for those around us, to pour ourselves out like a libation. John the Apostle tells us, *“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another”* (1 John 4:10-11)

How do we die daily to ourselves? We do it through self-denial and service for the benefit of others, through corporal and spiritual works of mercy, through bringing others to Christ, through our love of him, through our example. It is making the choice to Baptize all nations, to give our life so that others might live and discover resurrection in Christ. It may include giving up our dream in order to help another obtain theirs. How many parents worked much harder than they had to in order to give their child the greatest chance to pursue his or her dream in life? In the process of laying their own dreams aside, God gave them a dream for their child. Hopefully the dream included the greatest gift a parent can give: a living faith in Jesus Christ. The same is true for those who give their lives for others in time of need. It is in losing and in dying daily to our own personal dreams that we are infused with a dream for others. And what is Our dream, “That each and every human being have the time and information necessary to choose God.” Our dream is not lost then! No! It is

multiplied! Great leaders do not have great dreams for themselves; they have great dreams for others! Acts of unselfish love are the hallmarks of their achievement and success. Only when love takes over do we begin to live---truly LIVE!

The Second Letter to the Thessalonians speaks to us of the faithfulness of Christ, who is always present for us, watching over us with love, seeking to help us. Our challenge is to respond to that love. Especially if we are ever persecuted or misunderstood, we need to have confidence that Christ knows us as we really are and is present with us in every circumstance, helping us in His own divine way to give others example they need. Paul prays for us, *“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father 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 and word.”*

Some are willing to die for a country. Some will die for honor. Some will die for a cause. Many will die without a reason. Benjamin Franklin said, “Many people die at twenty-five and aren’t buried until they are seventy-five.” What he meant is that many people never truly live. It is simply an existence without a purposeful design. Jesus however created us for his design, His design for salvation of the world, His love for all humankind. The Church teaches us that: *“Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and*

*eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit"(CCC1817). To truly live is to choose Jesus' design as our own, to die to self-love and live for love of others. It is to live the prayer of St Francis, **O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.***