



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

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Summary reflection 8: Jesus promises eternal life

The following is a summary reflection of the eighth talk given by Father Raniero Cantalamessa to the US bishops during their 2019 retreat:

We begin by being with Jesus, being taught by him, and following his lead, such as partnering to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

People ordinarily choose a religion because they like the answers it gives to life's big questions, such as: Am I loved? Is suffering senseless? Is there life after death?

In answer to the last question, Jesus and his Catholic Church preaches the promise of eternal life: you can live forever!

Eternal life means, first of all, that at death we do not cease to exist. God created us with an eternal soul. So, at a funeral, we say in our prayers for the soul of the deceased, that life is changed, not ended.

Nor do we believe in reincarnation, coming back to life as someone or something else. God created each of us as unique and unrepeatable, not to be replaced, but held precious and in love eternally.

And so, we live after death, but not in a physical place, like Iowa, or up in the clouds. It's probably better to speak of the eternal life of heaven, rather than in heaven.

Our great Christian hope – the eternal life of heaven – is experienced as perfect union with God.

That doesn't sound like much to look forward to, unless we understand that perfect union with God satisfies what we desire, all of it, at once, completely, and forever.

Face it: a lot of our unrest, lack of peace, and sadness comes from unfulfilled desires, or the experience that no amount of stuff can fulfill our desire.

With the cessation of our desiring, there is peace. That's what we ask for when we pray for the dead: Eternal rest grant unto them. May they rest in peace. Aah!

We have the blessed assurance that this will happen as long as we express faith, hope, and love, saying: I do believe; I can be forgiven; and I will try to live a changed life.

Trying to live a changed life is important. Remember, the life of a Christian at death is changed, not ended, the change being from an imperfect to a perfect union with God.

And so, changed life starts now. For example, eternal life respects our person and dignity; we do the same for others. We live now united with God, who is all about love and mercy, so are we. We know that stuff can't make us happy, but is used to live in dignity, and to support the poor and the Church's mission.

We follow the example of Jesus, preaching Good News of the eternal life of heaven. This word attracts us and others to follow Jesus. It is a source of consolation to those who fear death. It is the source of a changed life here and in the hereafter.

Michael Jackels

Archbishop of Dubuque