

**November 10, 2019 I Do Not Die Homily:** One could make a legitimate case that Eugene Ionesco, a Romanian born French playwright, was one of the great literary figures of the last century. He was the writer of many critically acclaimed plays. Like so many intellectuals of his era, Ionesco had a rather pessimistic view of life. Human life has no purpose, no meaning and no destination. The ultimate absurdity of life is death. Not surprisingly, the author wrestles with death in many of his plays. In “Amedee”, the plot concerns a middle-aged married couple. Behind the closed doors of their bedroom is a corpse. The theatergoer is given no explanation of how the corpse got there in the first place. Was he murdered? The corpse is ignored and forgotten by the couple. It is as if the dead man were simply another article of furniture in their home. As the play progresses, the corpse blows up larger and larger until it floats away in the shape of a balloon on the way to nowhere. Clinging to the corpse is the play’s protagonist, the husband. In death, man returns to nothingness.

In today’s gospel reading (Lk. 20:27-38) Jesus engages in a spirited dialogue with some Sadducees, a highly influential priestly group of wealthy men who were members of the governing class. In view of their close collaboration with the occupying power of Rome, they were considered suspect by their fellow Jews. The Sadducees were biblical literalists and could find no explicit evidence of life after death in the first five books of the Old Testament. Not only was individual resurrection unscriptural, it was also absurd, and unworthy of belief. To this very day, most Rabbis hold firm that there is no afterlife. If there is a Resurrection it is the community of Israel that rises, and not the individual Jew.

Jesus shows the grave mistake the Sadducees make and he argues that God is not the God of the dead but of the living. (Lk.20:38) In other words, there is a permanent relationship between the Living God of Israel and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who have been dead for centuries. They are truly alive in God. Their souls are immortal. The lesson for the skeptic is that they must trust in God’s love for them and not dismiss his creative power.

Like Ionesco and his peers, many of us wrestle with the mystery of death. The great founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, once called the belief that death is the door to a better life is the oldest, strongest, most insistent wish of mankind. However, for the person of faith, death is a gateway, not an impenetrable wall. Belief in the Resurrection after death and everlasting life is a statement of faith.

Can we recognize in ourselves a burning desire for eternal life or life without end?

Do we think of heaven in terms of the earth, and fail to appreciate that in heaven life is changed, not ended?

Do we witness to the promise of heaven? In his reflections on today’s gospel Bishop Robert Barron shared the story of the Coptic Christians who were murdered by the Agents of ISIS in Egypt in 2015. The twenty innocent victims were dragged out of their beds in the middle of the night, kept in captivity for an extended period of time, eventually brought to a beach attired in orange jump suits, and threatened with beheading if they failed to renounce their Christian faith. To a man, they all refused. They died as martyrs. But there is another fascinating detail to this story of uncommon heroism. A twenty-first, victim, a non-Christian native of Chad and a fellow co-worker of the Coptic Christians, was issued an ultimatum by the masked band of thugs: “renounce your co-workers and their Christian faith or you,

too, will be executed". His reply was astounding and therefore memorable. So deeply impressed by his comrades' courage and conviction, he cried, "Their God is my God". Undoubtedly, his courage was rewarded. He, too, died a martyr.

In closing, let us recall the words of St. Paul in his first Letter to the Corinthians. "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him," (I Cor.2:9)

At the end of the day, all of us, believer and unbeliever alike, will be surprised once we cross over to the other side of our earthly life. Only then will the eyes of the skeptic be opened, and he will finally come to appreciate the truth about life and death. It will be a revelation unlike any other he experienced in his earthly life. He will discover that God, indeed, is the Lord of life, and that death is the door to a life without end.

Amen!