

September 23, 2020 Funeral Sermon: "Always"

In the English language there are few words as interesting and appealing as the word "always". It has a positive connotation. Indeed, the word has inspired songwriters such as Irving Berlin and, more recently Jon Bon-Jovi who wrote songs using "always" as the title. In the song of Berlin, which was dedicated to his future wife, we hear the words, "I'll be loving you always with a love that is true always. Not just for an hour, not just for a day, not just for a year, but always".

The motto of the U.S. Marine corps in Latin is "Semper Fi" or "Always faithful".

In 1989 the American actors Richard Dreyfuss and Holly Hunter were the featured players in the motion picture "Always".

But few things that happen to us in life are always. One cannot predict to be healthy "always". Nor can one stay young "always".

Sadly, our earthly life must one day come to an end. As we age, it often dawns on us how brief is the life span of a human being. In the book of Psalms, the poet acknowledges life's brevity. "Our days are like wild flowers, we bloom and die. The wind blows and we are gone as though we had never been here."

In a Capuchin Franciscan church located at the foot of the Via Veneto, the tourist or pilgrim comes upon a strange sight. From floor to ceiling, five chapels are ornamented with the bones of monks from ages past. At the entrance, a somber wooden placard warns all visitors, "We were like you, you will be like us". One of the tourists, A French philosopher and atheist, Jean Paul Sartre was especially annoyed. A rank materialist he had no expectation of life beyond the grave. He complained, "The greatest hoax of the Capuchins is that they impose the adorations of their dead victims upon the living". For Sartre, death likely meant oblivion, falling into a deep, dark hole.

A human being has an inborn desire for eternal life. The late Father Benedict Groeschel once told the story of a dear friend who was dying in a New York City hospital. She and her husband of many years were without the gift of faith. In a moment of candor, the unbelieving husband cried, "I wish my wife could live for another fifty years". "No you don't", replied the priest. "But what do mean?", asked the confused husband. "It's very simple. You want your wife to live forever." The sorrowful man agreed with him.

As Christians we hold fast to the belief that there is life after death. As we say in the Creed: I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

In today's gospel reading Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure. His crucifixion is imminent. But Jesus warns his disciples not to despair. He is going to prepare a place for them. "And If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be."

Today we mourn the passing of one who enjoyed gambling. Like many of my former parishioners in Frankfort, she spent time in some of our local casinos. But the safest bet she ever made was placed on

her faith in Christ. The odds were clearly in her favor. After all, the early disciples encountered the risen and glorified Christ on the evening of his resurrection. By placing her bet on Christ, she is assured of the ultimate jackpot.

In Saint Paul's first letter to the Christian church in Thessalonica, he exhorts the fledgling community to "rejoice always". (1 Thess. 5:16) Why? It is because, for the Christian believer, death is not the end of the human story. For them life is changed, not ended. Eternal life awaits those who love Christ and have been faithful to Him.

Amen!