

Funeral homily December 29, 2020

In one episode of the classic television series, "The Twilight Zone", a frail, elderly lady named Wanda lives alone in a basement apartment without even a telephone. A recluse, she has not left her home in years. What's worse, she refuses to allow any one in to her apartment. She lives in fear of death. She convinces herself that death, the Grim Reaper, will one day turn up at her door. In her mind, death is the opposite of life.

At one point in the story, an attractive young man named Harold,, played by Robert Redford, manages to deceive the old woman by threatening her with eviction if she continues to keep him out of her apartment. Once he is inside, he assures her that she has nothing to fear and gently persuades her to give him her hand. Before she realizes anything has happened, she finds herself standing beside her dead body. Wanda and Harold walk arm and arm through the doorway, up the stairs, outside into the sunlight.

Wanda had an intimate experience of the gentle face of death. Death can be one's friend, especially for one who has endured untold suffering in his life.

Death casts a shadow over the entire human race. Scripture refers to death as the last enemy. The twentieth century German philosopher, Martin Heidegger once compared a human being to an arrow. From the first moment of our birth we are aimed toward death. The arrow never veers off course, never slows its pace. According to Heidegger, authentic human existence begins when we face our mortality and admit to ourselves the truthful words, "I am going to die" Death concentrates our minds.

But as Christians, we no longer have to be paralyzed by fear because we know what awaits us--- a glorious Resurrection. The only known cure for fear is faith.

In today's gospel, Jesus, on the night of the Last Supper, speaks words of comfort to his anxious disciples. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God. Have faith also in me".

From the perspective of a devout Christian, death means going home. In his Father's house there are many dwelling places. Saint Paul writes, "I would much rather take leave of my body and be at home with the Lord".

Death means the hope of being re-united with our loved ones who have crossed over to the other shore. At the hour of death, there is a longing to see the familiar faces of those who touched our lives in so many ways;

Death means "resting in peace". Our life will no longer be haunted by personal regrets and crippling anxieties.

One of the hymns that is favored by a family mourning the loss of a family member is "Be Not Afraid". The words are consoling: "Be not afraid. I go before you always. Come follow me, and I will give you rest".

The handsome face of Robert Redford's character gives us a welcome view of death that is assuring and leaves us less fearful and more open to the possibility of a new life that awaits us in the hereafter.

The words we sometimes hear at a funeral mass are thoughtful and comforting in the face of death. "For the faithful, life is changed, not ended