

Funeral homily for Mary Joan Hart April 15, 2021

In his classic work, "The Brothers Karamazov", the nineteenth century novelist Dostoevsky explores one of the ultimate questions of life. In a poignant scene, a woman searching to rediscover her Christian faith in life after death approached the Christ-like figure, Father Zossima, a saintly Russian Orthodox priest. She begins to pepper him with questions: "Father, is there really life beyond the grave?", "Father, Do I live only to disappear without a trace after death?", "Father, where am I to look for proofs that will satisfy my reason and calm my fears?"

Anxious to respond to her concerns, Father Zossima replied, "There is no proving it, though you can be convinced of it. How? By the experience of active love. Strive to love your neighbor actively. Insofar as you advance in love you will grow surer of the reality of God and the immortality of your soul."

Death is and will always remain a profound mystery. For Christians, earthly life is a pilgrimage. Life is a preparation for eternity. Since human life has a specific destination, the church's mission is to lead us home to God. Our life is designed for heaven.

The mystery of Easter, Christ's Resurrection, teaches us two lessons of monumental importance. First, Christ came back from the death to assure us that there is indeed life beyond the grave; and two, Love, whose origin is in God, never dies. By his death and Resurrection, Love has triumphed over death and is stronger than death. Christ is the embodiment of Divine Love.

Several years ago, Father Benedict Groeshel, a Franciscan priest, paid a visit to a woman who was at the door of death. She was not blessed with the gift of faith. Neither was her husband. Both were University professors. In a moment of candor, the husband of the dying woman exclaimed to the Priest, "Father, I wish my wife could live another thirty years". Father Groeshel replied, "No, you do not". Taken aback, the professor said, "And what do you mean?" "You wish your wife could live forever"! Sadly, he agreed with the priest. It is in the nature of death to want to be eternal.

Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ means that there is a future for every human being, that the cry for unending life which is the desire of every human being is indeed answered. With Saint Paul, we can say that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, your loved one has died. Nevertheless, your love for her remains strong as ever. Her death does not rob you of all the beautiful memories.

In John's account of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus spoke comforting words to his sister, "I am the Resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who believes in me will never die."

And then he addresses a question to her and also to each one of us. "Do you believe this?"

Yes, o Lord, we truly believe you. You have the words of everlasting life.