

Homily for the eleventh Sunday in ordinary time B cycle

While performing a series of concerts in England in 1966, songwriter and recording artist Paul Simon, penned a song about going home. Living out of a suitcase far from his native home of New York City turned out to be a constant challenge for the traveling artist. In the popular song "Homeward Bound", Simon writes of his inner struggles;

"Every day is an endless stream of cigarettes and magazines, and each town looks the same to me, the movies and the factories, I long to be homeward bound".

In Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Church at Corinth, he teaches that this life of ours is like traveling abroad from our home country.

"We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:6).

We are pilgrims traveling in a strange land. Our home is not the one we live in at present, which serves only as a temporary dwelling. The Christian's true dwelling place is with God. His citizenship is in heaven.

Saint Paul looked forward to death as to a homecoming. He writes, "We would much rather leave the body and go home to the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:7). In addition, in his letter to the Philippians, he writes of his desire to depart from this life and be with Christ (Phil. 2:23). He sees himself on a journey far from his destined home.

His words of hope are echoed by the author to the Letter to the Hebrews: "For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come" (Heb.13:14).

Father Ronald Knox, an English Catholic priest and convert to the Catholic Church, gave many conferences on the so-called "last things": death, judgment, heaven, hell and purgatory. In one of his meditations on death, he wrote wistfully of the brevity of our life on this earth.

"This life is not our permanent residence, only a kind of hotel where our rooms will be wanted sooner or later by someone else".

Let us ask ourselves, "How often do we think of going home?"

Are we too distracted by what this world, a world passing away, has to offer?

Do we long to be re-united with our dear loved ones who have preceded us to what the church calls eternity?

When I was a young curate at Sacred Heart church in the late eighties and early nineties, I visited a dying parishioner, Julia Dunn, who was a patient in the intensive care unit of Samaritan hospital. While administering the last rites of the church, the sacrament of the sick and dying, she interrupted my prayers and said to me, "Father, if you pray for me and I should recover, I will kill you". Taken aback, I asked for an explanation. "My husband, a long time police officer, died many years ago. I miss him so much. My only desire is to be reunited with him. Please don't stand in the way".

In the Creed we recite each and every Sunday, we speak words of hope, "We look forward to the Resurrection of the Body and the life of the world to come". That life is one in company with our deceased loved ones.

Saint Augustine reflected on Saint Paul's words and offered the following trenchant observation.

This homeland towards which we travel is the only place where we can find true rest because God does not wish us to find rest anywhere else but there.

The reason is simple.

If God gave us perfect rest while we were still abroad, we would find no pleasure in returning home.

A few hours before slipping into a coma, Pope John Paul said to those at his bedside "let me go to the House of the Father".

May we all share the sentiments of the great apostle, Saint Paul:

"For to me life is Christ, and death is gain" (Phil. 1:23).