

Funeral homily for Jack Madden

In a tradition dating back to the time of Saint Benedict, monks begin their daily round of prayers in the early hours of the morning by chanting a verse from the third Psalm of the Old Testament. :

“I lie down to sleep

And I awake again

For the Lord upholds me”

For the Christian faithful, the very act of rising from sleep is not without significance. It is a daily rehearsal for our rising from the sleep of death, one of life’s most profound mysteries. To rise from sleep is a kind of first taste of that final and definitive rising that sustains our hope.

Our daily rising from sleep prefigures our resurrection.

Especially noteworthy in John’s account of the raising of Lazarus are the words Jesus spoke to his disciples: “Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him. So the disciples said to him, ‘Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved’. But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought he meant ordinary sleep” (Jn. 11:13).

Jesus calls upon his disciples to recognize that death is not the end of human life; it is only a temporary phase from which all will be awakened to Resurrection.

Saint Paul also uses the metaphor of sleep in his writings to signify death.

“Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep”.

“We would not have you ignorant concerning those who have fallen asleep, that you may not grieve as others who have no hope”.

Saint Paul also quotes an ancient baptismal hymn:

“Awake, o sleeper, and arise from the dead and Christ shall give you light.”

In death, a Christian is wide awake and enters a world radiant with Christ. To encounter Jesus is the supreme fulfillment of our life.

A contemporary Catholic scribe, David Mills was once asked if he feared dying. He replied, “I fear not dying”.

Death marks a new birth, a new beginning.

At the end of his long life, Jack Madden, a longtime parishioner whose many contributions were worthy of the highest praise, longed for death. He wanted to be re-united with his beloved wife, Sophie, whose passing years ago was one of the shattering moments of his life, and two of his children, who predeceased him.

Jack was a loving father and husband, and a man of questioning faith. Although he had his doubts, he remained steadfast in his faith until the day he died.

Yes, he is missed, but we take comfort that we will see him again once we cross to the other shore of life.