

Homily Year 33 B - November 15, 2021

The end is coming! The world as we know it will be gone! The signs are all around us. Be careful! Doom and gloom constitute the two operative words when we hear or speak about the end of time. Listen to the gospel's language: The sun will be darkened; the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky; the powers in the heavens will be shaken. The descriptions go on. Even in our world today death can be waiting when we least expect it.

However, even though we see and read about these events, even though we mourn with those who mourn, and even though our prayers are with those who are suffering so much, nevertheless, it's not personal. It's not one of us. Ultimately, the one death that should concern us the most is our death, the stark reality that we will die.

Admittedly, we do not like speaking or even listening about the topic. However, the experience of death is going to affect every person in this church. No one escapes death.

I would like to speak with you about one aspect of death - your funeral. There is a tendency today, after death, to expedite everything as soon as possible. People are bypassing wakes, bypassing prayers, bypassing burials, and even bypassing the funerals themselves. Some may say that this lack of attention to funerals is due to COVID. Well, that's partially responsible, but the trend that I referred to was happening even before COVID. So, I would like to look at a few of the aspects surrounding death.

Why are wakes important? Friends and relatives of the survivors want to be part of the lives of the survivors. They want the opportunity to express to the living their prayers and solidarity with you who were the closest to the deceased person. They want the opportunity to say: "I am with you." A wake invites others into your life and allows them to share in your grief. Likewise, the wake gives people a final opportunity to say good-bye to the deceased.

A funeral Mass celebrates in prayer the person's relationship with God and the fulfillment with God of that person's life on earth. A life that has been spent in regular on-going prayer should end with the greatest of prayers, the Eucharist. In the funeral Mass, the Christian community celebrates a life lived in union with God.

The burial is truly the last earthly contact between the living and the deceased. Our going back to the earth reminds us clearly of the fragility of our lives. In saying farewell to our beloved, we pray that the deceased find union with God in heaven and that we all share in that destiny.

Some of us may say, especially as we get older, something like: "I don't want people to fuss over me." Well, my friends, people do want to fuss over you. You formed part of their lives. You worked with them; you raised them up; you helped them; you nurtured them. It is only appropriate that you give them the opportunity to say goodbye in a fitting and dignified manner.

Unfortunately, today, many people who have the responsibility of burying their parents and grandparents have lost contact with the Church, the local Catholic community. Their lack of comfort with religion should never be imposed on the deceased person who loved and served God. While you still live, you should make it clear and in writing that, as you lived with the Lord while on earth, you wish to die with the Lord on your journey to heaven.

All of what I have said can be part of your funeral whether you choose traditional ground burial or cremation. The final disposition of our remains must respect the human person and the religious ties that were so important in that person's life.

We say and we believe that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. We pray here today knowing about our mortality. Let us pray that we can face death with the same joy, peace, and religious fervor as we face life each day. As temples of the Holy Spirit, may we live and die in union with our God.