

“I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” (Ps 23:6cd). God blesses with the gift of life. Through injustice, sin, neglect, or circumstances beyond our control, life is often very harsh and difficult. But life is still a blessing, for life is not limited to the days between our birth and our death.

The Prophet Jeremiah tells us, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you” (1:5). Life for us begins at conception. But for God, our precious life has begun prior to conception. Life is sacred and meant beyond this life for eternity.

Human life is created in the likeness and image of God. What does it mean to be created “like God?” We turn to the holy sacrifice of the Mass and we hear about the blessedness of life:

O God, Creator and Redeemer of human nature,
who willed that your Word should take flesh
in an ever-virgin womb,
look with favor on our prayers,
that your Only Begotten Son,
having taken to himself our humanity,
may be pleased to grant us a share in his divinity. (Collect December 17).

In God’s likeness, we are created with a purpose, to share eternal life with God in heaven. God became human so that we might share in his divinity... a gift that is fully realized after our death when we are born to eternal life.

Our mortal bodies are made of perishable flesh and blood. But the human body has an immortal soul. Human life has a definite beginning, but this gift from God blessed with a soul has no end. Yes, the body perishes, but the immortal soul is blessed to live on forever. How is this possible? Again from the sacred liturgy of the Mass, the priest or deacon pours wine and a little water into the chalice, saying quietly: “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” In the proper reception of Holy Communion, we receive the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, of our Risen Savior. Our human flesh receives the Divine Flesh and Divine Blood to help us grow more and more into the image and likeness of God.

God’s plan for every human is eternal life. “I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” Our Gospel tells us of the invitation. “Behold, I have prepared my banquet, my calves and fattened cattle are killed, and everything is ready; come to the feast” (Mt 12:4). Let us marry the words of the Gospel with the words of the liturgy:

Through Christ the children of light rise to eternal life
and the halls of the heavenly Kingdom
are thrown open to the faithful;
for his Death is our ransom from death,
and in his rising the life of all has risen. (Preface II of Easter).

The ultimate expression of the Eucharist is union with God at the heavenly banquet in the kingdom to come.

Jesus tells the parable of the invited guests who refused to come to the wedding feast. Some ignored the invitation and went away. Is this not the rejection Jesus experienced in his hometown of Nazareth? He told them, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to

the Lord” (Lk 4:18-19). But the people who knew him, rose up to drive him out of town. Is this not a foreshadowing of Jerusalem when Jesus is rejected, condemned to death, and crucified?

Beyond the Gospel, God invites us to the heavenly banquet through our baptism. He promises us eternal life. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth” (Eph 5:8-9). The Lord guides us in right paths, but we can take the wrong path. We can reject God. We can embrace sin. Like the Prodigal son, we can take our inheritance and squander it.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a second invitation to seek forgiveness and to restore our garments to their baptismal purity. The prodigal son saw the error of his ways and went in utter poverty back to his Father for a chance to work as a hired hand. All was forgiven. A fine white robe was placed on his back, a ring on his finger, and sandals on his feet. The servants prepared a fattened calf to celebrate with a banquet. The brother who had not left the farm, wanted nothing to do with the banquet, so the Father went to him inviting him to let go of the grudge and to join in the banquet. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

God invites man and woman to a foretaste of the heavenly banquet through Holy Matrimony. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word” (Eph 5:25-26). Husbands be willing to sacrifice your life for your bride as Christ sacrificed his life on the cross. Wives respond in kind to the loving sacrifice of a husband who mirrors the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Jesus’ parable warns us that some may try to enter the guest hall without the proper wedding garment. Living in sin, rejecting the gift of life, redefining marriage, infidelity, abuse and violence are all grave sins against God and against marriage. Lest the king have his attendants bind our hands and feet and cast us into darkness, “May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts, so that we may know what is the hope that belongs to our call” (Eph 1:17-18).

- Lord heal my blindness to the invitation and help me to walk in your holy ways so that I may live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

After Jesus told his parable, the Pharisees went off and plotted to entrap him. They did not accept the invitation. What will you do?

- Will you accept the blessing of life from God by working for justice?
- Will you look at sin in your own life and seek God’s healing through reconciliation?
- Will you reach out with love and mercy to help the neighbor burdened by the uncontrollable circumstances of life?
- Will you embrace the human dignity of life in the womb and champion the cause of life?
- Will you accept God’s invitation to join him in the heavenly banquet and live in the house of the Lord all the days of your life?