

Sunday Reflection

- ◆ **First Reading:** *Acts 1:12-14*
- ◆ **Second Reading:** *1 Peter 4:13-16*
- ◆ **Gospel:** *John 17:1-11a*

The Gospel reading this Sunday is taken from st. John 17 ; 1 – 11 ; In this reading Jesus is interceding to the Heavenly Father on behalf of the apostles, it is part of the Last Supper discourse, also referred to as the priestly prayer of Our Lord ;

The circumstances are less than joyful, death was not far off for their lord and Master, there was sadness, so Jesus had to give them words of spiritual comfort ; You'll notice in the reading Jesus presents his definition of eternal life, he said to them **AND ETERNAL LIFE IS THIS ; TO KNOW YOU, THE ONLY TRUE GOD, AND JESUS CHRIST WHOM YOU HAVE SENT ;**

If I went outside and asked passers-by “How do you understand eternal life”??

more than likely I'd get a funny look!! Or who knows?, I may get a pleasant surprize. As we all know, before entering into ETERNAL LIFE we have to deal with a brutal reality of life, and that is the reality of death. Who are the frontline people who deal with life and death??, doctors, nurses, carers, pharmacists, police, forensic staff etc., and of course undertakers!! A number of years ago, while working in the Willesden parish, I had to officiate at a funeral, i.e., funeral mass followed by burial in Kensal Green cemetery off the Harrow road ; After burial, the usual custom is that one of the undertaker drivers would take the priest back to the parish church ; sometimes there was traffic congestion on the way, therefore opportunities to converse with the driver arose ; on this particular occasion and I suppose out of my own curiosity, I happened to ask the driver

“How long now are you in the undertaking business?”

“over 12 years father, I collect them and bury them” ; then came my big question, “in all your undertaking, do you yourself believe that the dead move on to something better”???, then came a blunt reply “Not at all father!!!, once you’r dead, you’r dead, and that’s the end of you”....

“a challenging conversation” says you, no!, I didn’t try to change the good man’s mindset, not everyone has been given the gift of Faith and why that is will be a theme for another day.

But the same issue will eventually rebound to all of us at some stage, “what issue?”, the reality of death. How is it that many people would prefer not to talk about it?, is it out of fear?, or maybe better “to talk about something else, but not THAT”!!

As I write these lines the coronavirus death rate here in the U.K. now exceeds 36.000, that’s in a space of less than 3 months!, praise God that you and I are not part of that frightening number, let’s just say we have “escaped” so far!!,

But surely it has crossed our minds and indeed the minds of all the loved ones of those who have died, that same question, “where are they?”, “where have they gone?” ; oh yes! they are no more to be seen in their physical form, a terrible virus has shortened their lifespan, but where are they??, have they gone to eternal life with God? or are we left floundering for answers??

The readings this Sunday are a challenge to our Faith in the afterlife with God, even the response to the psalm is uplifting **I AM SURE I SHALL SEE THE LORD’S GOODNESS IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING....**

The land of the living referred to, is of course life with God for all eternity, it started when we were baptized, it will be glorified when we reach Heaven, remembering once again the last line of our Creed

... AND I LOOK FORWARD TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME...amen..

And so on this Sunday pray for those whose Faith is weak, for those who have abandoned the quest for holiness, pray for the broken hearted who have recently lost loved ones, pray for those who have given up on God and man,

..pray especially for those who wake up each morning and see no purpose to their lives ; In contrast to Our Lord's definition of eternal life in to-day's Gospel reading, I'll conclude with a very uplifting piece of scripture, taken from st.Paul's first letter to the Corinthians 15 ; 40., The following quote is a fascinating description of the manner of the resurrection or the manner of life after death or the journey of the soul heading towards Heaven ; the "thing" refers to our mortal physical frame ;

“...THEN THERE ARE HEAVENLY BODIES, AND THERE ARE EARTHLY BODIES, BUT THE HEAVENLY BODIES HAVE A BEAUTY OF THEIR OWN, AND THE EARTHLY BODIES A DIFFERENT ONE ; THE SUN HAS IT'S BRIGHTNESS, THE MOON HAS A DIFFERENT BRIGHTNESS, AND THE STARS A DIFFERENT BRIGHTNESS, THE STARS DIFFER FROM EACH OTHER IN BRIGHTNESS ;

IT IS THE SAME WITH THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD!!

THE THING THAT IS SOWN IS PERISHABLE, BUT WHAT IS RAISED IS IMPERISHABLE ;

THE THING THAT IS SOWN IS CONTEMPTIBLE, BUT WHAT IS RAISED IS GLORIOUS ;

THE THING THAT IS SOWN IS WEAK, BUT WHAT IS RAISED IS POWERFUL ;

WHEN IT IS SOWN IT EMBODIES THE SOUL, WHEN IT IS RAISED IT EMBODIES THE SPIRIT ;

IF THE SOUL HAS IT'S OWN EMBODIMENT, SO DOES THE SPIRIT HAVE IT'S OWN EMBODIMENT..”

Fr Kieran A. Fitzharris SVD