

HOMILY~ NOVEMBER 5/6, 2022

32nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

There was a man who died; and one of the women from church was trying to console Mary, his widow. The woman said to her, *“Fred is in heaven now, surrounded by the choirs of angels.”* And Mary started to cry. The woman said, *“Fred is being greeted by thousands of martyrs.”* And Mary cried even more. The woman said, *“Fred is being welcomed by all the saints.”* And Mary cried even more. Finally the woman realized that she was just making things worse and she asked, *“Mary, what is wrong?”* And Mary said, *“Fred hated crowds.”* As human beings, we have a hard time imagining outside of the realm of our experience. Heaven is something outside of our experience, but we still try and apply our experience to it.

In the Gospel Reading, we find the Sadducees, spiritual leaders of the time who did not believe in the resurrection. It made no sense to them from their experience. They concoct a ridiculous scenario where a woman is widowed without children. According to Jewish law, his brother was required to marry her to give her children so that she would be taken care of. She married and buried seven brothers. First of all, I wonder why the brothers kept marrying her. I think I would have caught on after brother number three. They asked Jesus whose wife the woman would be at the resurrection. Jesus does not answer their question because it cannot be answered from their experience. They had to adopt a bigger view of the Kingdom of God. A non-physical world where there would no longer be any need for marriage. Till death do you part has no meaning in heaven. There will be no death.

What do you think heaven will be like? As a child, I had this vision of floating on a cloud by myself playing a harp. Frankly, heaven seemed like a pretty boring place to me. Heaven is not a physical place. Heaven is more of a spiritual state where our soul will be united with our glorified body. We do not know what our spiritual body will look like, but maybe it will not look like anything at all. Seeing is one of the physical senses. If I were to try to describe heaven in terms of our experience, I would

describe it as a place where everyone lived a fully Christian life, where there would be no more war, no more hatred, no more conflict. We will be at peace. Everyone would share what they have generously so that no one would go without anything. Everyone would love and serve one another perfectly so there would be no more pain, no more disappointment, no more failures, and no more shame.

We limit God when we try and define everything by our experience. God is so much bigger than we can comprehend. When we pray and God does not give us what we want, we think God does not hear us, God does not love us and God is not taking care of us. God probably just has something different in store for us. God has a bigger picture of our lives than we have; and it includes not just our life on earth, but what we will become in heaven as well. Heaven is our destiny. We have to have faith and know that God is God and we are not.

While heaven is beyond our experience, there is continuity between this world and the next. We hear in Scripture that the Kingdom of Heaven starts here. After death, we will be the person we have become in life for all eternity, and that is shaped by our experience. We will retain our individual identity. We will recognize and be with the people we knew in this life and with many others. Many of the things we thought were important in this life will not be important. Your job, your degrees, your portfolio, your house and possessions will not be important. When you die, someone will put a dumpster in your driveway and empty out your house; and another family will be living there soon. We will not take any of this with us. What will matter is the good we did, the love we shared, the people that we helped. These are the things that shape the person we become. We will be united with God, and I think that is what God will care about. And it will not matter if we changed the world. What will matter is if we tried, if we did what we could. What do you think heaven will be like? Of course, we do not know for sure; but I will be dying to find out.

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim