

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME: NOVEMBER 6, 2022

In my most recent blog I tried to summarize the present status of the planned Synod. It is surprising to realize how many people know very little about it. One person pleads that there should be no more changes in the church. Another respondent simply said, “you are beating a dead horse.” I took that to mean that the church is dead and we are wasting our time. Somehow that message interested me. Yes, I thought, the church as we have known it is dying. To simply try to repeat the past is beating a dead horse. To try to avoid change as well as death just won’t work.

It is not only the church which is dying. Death is part of the life process. As I have gotten older, I have come to realize that change, diminishment, letting go, surrender to God are part of my life. This has by no way meant that I have sat back and not cared about living. Knowing that I will die, maybe soon, maybe later, frees me to give whatever I can and rely on God to bring it to fruition. There is no excuse for bitterness, for despair, for passive resignation. As Dag Hammarskjöld once said, “For all that has been, thanks; for that which will be, yes!”

The Sadducees did not believe in any life after death. It is not mentioned in the Torah so it could not be. They dare Jesus to prove otherwise. Jesus cleverly turns to the Torah itself to give them a new appreciation. He refers to Moses and the burning bush in the Book of Exodus, in which God appears and announces that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This God is the God of the living, not of the dead, so these ancestors are still alive.

The story of the seven Maccabean brothers and their indomitable mother points to the deeper significance of this story. What we are facing here is the meaning of human life. Is the meaning of human life limited to the years we live as historical bodies on this earth? It is reported that 17% of the American population do not believe in any life after death. The rest of us live with an insatiable longing, thirst, desire for life, for love, for ultimate meaning. Could our relationships with God and people past and present indicate that we are more than a temporary composition of living, changing cells? Is not seeing ourselves as integral to the natural world a learning process of dying and new life? Above all, is not belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ a sign to us of what life is all about? We

call this process the Paschal Mystery and see in Jesus Christ the pattern of all our lives. Jesus embraced death to be one with us in all of life's pain, suffering and diminishment. He rose to signal what death leads to, new life, a fullness of life beyond the grave.

I suspect the key to everlasting life is love which is stronger than death. Karl Rahner suggested that in the life of the world to come, we will be lovingly related to the entire universe. Teilhard de Chardin said this: "Someday after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire."

Pope Francis also helps us to see the meaning of a life based on love. He wrote in *Fratelli Tutti*, "Life exists where there is bonding, communion, fraternity; and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity."

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