

Homily for November 14, 2021, 33rd Sunday

Today is the last of several Sundays where our Second Reading is from the Letter to the Hebrews. The recent passages, including today's, center around the theme of Christ's Priesthood. He is our great high priest. A priest offers sacrifice. The priests of the Temple offered sacrifices continually. This was not just because the people constantly needed to give thanks and ask forgiveness. It was also because the priests themselves were imperfect and were sinners.

But Christ is infinite, He is perfect, and He never sinned. His sacrifice was therefore not something He needed for Himself. His death on the Cross, which we understand as a Sacrifice to the Father for us and all people, is perfect and pure. All of its graces overflow to us. It is the Perfect Sacrifice. And it is a once-and-for-all event.

The Holy sacrifice of the Mass is not us repeatedly offering a new sacrifice to the Father. The Eucharist is us, over and over, entering into the One great Sacrifice of thanksgiving that The Son Offered the Father. The Mass is God allowing us to enter into the one great sacrifice of the Cross. We join our sacrifice of bread and wine to Christ's perfect sacrifice of His Body and Blood. And He then gives us that sacrifice as nourishment and strength and union.

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Because this is the last of our readings from the Letter to the Hebrews, it is a good time to speak of last things and endings as a whole.

Next week is the Feast of Christ the King. It begins the last week of the Liturgical Year. The Liturgical Year ends in two weeks.

When we speak of an end, we speak of it in two ways.

The first meaning we attach to "end" is that when something ends; it stops, it is finished. Games end. Stories have a closing sentence. There is a final note in a piece of music. All people will have a last day on earth until the Resurrection comes.

To ponder that there is an end for each of us is an invitation to make sure we are ready; that we are concentrating on what is most important.

The second meaning of the word “end” involves its purpose. When we make something, we have an end product in mind. Ends are goals. Literally, some sports have goals, goalies, and goal keepers. Some experts in time management speak of “beginning with the end in mind.” They use the example that a person does not want to work hard getting to the top of the ladder, and discover it is leaning against the wrong wall.

We all have an end, or purpose. We have been made for God. Christ has given us the command to follow His command of Love. The Church has spelled that out in more detail in how we behave, how we worship, and what we are to believe. All of this is to get us to our end, our goal. It is the target. By keeping our eye on the target, it keeps us going in the right direction.

Both of these meanings of the word “end” apply to us. Our end is our final moments. And our end is God’s desired destiny for us. We want these two meanings to connect, to meet up, to be the same. To remember that we have an ending is to remember that we have a purpose for which God has made us.

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In terms of the end times – people sometimes forget how often Our Lord’s descriptions include what our Gospel ends with today:

“But of that day or hour, no one knows...but only the Father.”

And when they forget, they get distracted by trying to figure out the time of the ending, instead of focusing on the goal to head toward.

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This week we celebrated the Feast Day of Saint Martin of Tours. Saint Martin was born is Three Hundred Sixteen. He was a military man who became Christian, and lived life as a hermit, a monk, and a bishop.

The Office of Readings had a description of his final days. I share with you some of that reading.

Martin knew long in advance the time of his death and he told his brethren that it was near. Meanwhile, he found himself obliged to make

a visitation of the parish of Candes. The clergy of that church were quarrelling, and he wished to reconcile them.

He spent some time in Candes, or rather in its church, where he stayed. Peace was restored, and he was planning to return to his monastery when suddenly he began to lose his strength. He summoned his brethren and told them he was dying. All who heard this were overcome with grief. In their sorrow they cried to him with one voice: "Father, why are you deserting us? - We know you long to be with Christ, but your reward is certain and will not be any less for being delayed.

Thereupon he broke into tears, for he was a man in whom the compassion of our Lord was continually revealed. Turning to our Lord, he made this reply to their pleading: "Lord, if your people still need me, I am ready for the task; your will be done."

Here was a man words cannot describe. Death could not defeat him nor toil dismay him. He was quite without a preference of his own; he neither feared to die nor refused to live.

It goes on from there. But that is a good line to remember regarding our ending, and our end:

“He neither feared to die nor refused to live.”

May we also live lives in such a way that people can say of our Christian love and our gospel hope for heaven that, “We neither feared to die nor refused to live.”