

Opening the Word: Made for God's presence



We have undoubtedly heard well-intentioned souls comfort those who have lost a loved one by saying, "Do not worry, your beloved is now in a better place."

In a limited sense, this is our hope. Catholics confess that our fundamental vocation is eternal beatitude. We are made to be in the presence of God.

And yet, there is a problem in this act of comfort. It passes too quickly over the horrible separation that takes place in death. Death means an experienced loss of personal communion. Death is the end of our face-to-face communication. We cannot hug the dead, rejoice in their laughter, listen to their stories or gaze into their eyes.

We must see death as the real loss that it is if we are to also understand the salvation brought about by Christ.

Jeremiah is a prophet haunted by the prospect of death. This fear of death is not related to natural dying but terror before the possibility of vengeance by his former friends. The prophet speaks the divine word to Israel who does not want to hear it. The sons of Israel seek to entrap him so that they can end his life.

[June 21 – 12th Sunday
in Ordinary Time](#)

Jer 20:10-13
Ps 69:8-10, 14, 17,
33-35
Rom 5:12-15
Mt 10:26-33

And still, Jeremiah hopes. He is not naive before the peril he faces but confesses the power of the God who tests and yet comforts the just. He does not worry about his fate but gives it over to God who always accompanies the poor.

And as Paul reminds us, we are each, in some way, members of this community of the poor. Insofar as each of us has inherited death's reign, our power is limited. The human family, no matter our wealth, our supposed security, each share something in common – we are born to die.

But Paul does not stop there. The reign of death has been defeated by the one who has risen from the dead. The gift of eternal life is now available. There is hope for us to pass through death's dominion. This hope has a name: Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The gift bestowed by Jesus is the reason we can preach the Gospel without fear. Jesus does not deny the darkness, the possibility of death to those who both preach and live the Gospel. The body can be killed!

In fact, Christians should expect this violence if we live as citizens of the kingdom of God. Citizens of this kingdom proclaim and live a peace that the polis rejects. We give our cloak over to the one who has wronged us, our face to be spit upon. We recognize the dignity of every life, every race, every person, no matter their age.

We are defenders of love, witnesses of dignity, martyrs of truth to the God and Father of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

If we live like this, we should expect violence, darkness,

even death. And yet, even a poor sparrow may fall to the ground, remaining in God's tender care. For if God does not abandon the sparrow in its poverty, what about those of us who acknowledge the power of Jesus Christ?

God cares for us, even as we traipse this valley of tears toward death. We should walk without fear of dying, preaching the Good News, even in places where many do not want to hear it.

Every life has dignity. Even that tiny sparrow. This truth must be proclaimed on the streets of Minneapolis, on the borders of El Paso, and in the swampy humid air of the nation's capital.

Just don't expect a parade.

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