

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 17, 2024

I'm sure many of you like me don't like to hear a long, boring story. It's not a fun experience at all. We all have people in our lives who once they start a story they can't seem to get out of it. And it drives us crazy. They just go on and on and on. Maybe you are one of those people. And when that happens, when I find myself listening to someone who seems to have no intention of stopping soon, I always want to blurt out, "Just get to the ending!"

Endings, I believe matter in all different areas of our lives. And some of us, well, that's pretty much all we care about. If we go to the movies, some people just want us to tell them how it "turns out". Some of us quickly check the scores of games from the day before, but would never "waste" time watching the actual game. Some of us start reading a mystery, lose interest, and quickly flip to the end to see who the killer was. Many of us just care about the grade we get in a class, not whether or not we will retain the material that was taught. Some of us spend our entire working lives counting down the days to our retirement, focused exclusively on what we perceived was the goal of the whole thing in the first place, the day we wouldn't have to do it anymore. People become obsessed with how long-running TV shows will end, as if how it ends determines whether it was a good experience or not. And I'm sure that many people on the eve of their wedding wish they could gaze into the future to see how it would all turn out. Yes, endings matter.

Nowhere is this probably truer than in matters of faith. One of the great "appeals" of early Christianity (for lack of a better word), was that initial Gospel message, that Jesus had risen from the dead. Think about the outrageousness of that claim. But it was more than that. You see, it was tangible, visible, concrete "evidence" that the "ending" had changed. No longer was life just a drudgery that came to an inglorious end with death.

Jesus had brought about a new ending, a new eternal reality, something new to hope for and long for.

And we've been hoping for and longing for it ever since. Some of the things Jesus said particularly about his return, made people wonder if that would happen within their lifetimes. Early Christians lived every day wondering if this was "the day", the day they had been waiting for, the day on which the promises of Jesus would be fulfilled. Yet, Jesus had cautioned them earlier against trying to figure it out, against trying to predict how and when God's plan would unfold. And after he was gone, it was up to his followers to just remain faithful, live each day in the newness of life he had won for them.

We, two thousand years later, still hold on to that same hope. We still wonder about how this will all come to an end, how God will bring about the fulfillment of his plan for all of creation. And we wonder if we are even close, if we even have a little bit of understanding of what it will be like, what will happen.

But the "how" and the "what" of the "ending" aren't what most of us are concerned with. No, most of us want to know the "when," we want to know when this ending will take place. And the ending we are talking about, the one we are most concerned with, isn't the ending of the universe or the end of time, it's the ending of our individual lives.

Isn't that right? I'm guessing that many of us would like to have some idea of how long we will live, some idea of how much time we have left. And some of that "wanting to know" is simply for practical purposes, so that we can plan financially, or get our affairs in order, or pursue certain careers, or marry or not, or have children or not, those sorts of things.

But mostly, we would want to know so that we could make the changes we need to make. We want time to reconcile with people from whom we are estranged. We want time to give more money to worthy causes. We want time to say the things we need to say to our spouses and children,

things we should have been saying all along. We want time to say “I’m sorry” to people we have wronged. We want time to be more patient, and kinder, and more compassionate, and more understanding.

Put simply, each of us wants time to be the person God created us to be, the best versions of ourselves.

In other words, we want to know the “when” of our ending so that we can do the things we need to do to be more confident of the “what” of our ending, so that we can be more hopeful, more certain that God will welcome us home with open arms.

My dear friends, when Jesus says, “But of that day or hour, no one knows . . .,” he is certainly referring to his return at the end of time. The text makes that clear. But in a certain sense, he’s also sort of saying that to us, in this time and place. None of us knows the length of our lives, nor are we meant to know. And so the wisest thing to do, the prudent thing to do, the truly faithful thing to do is to make the changes in our lives that need to be made right now, start being the beautiful person God created us to be right now.

And not simply to “get what we want” from God, but so that we can transform our lives and this world into the beautiful place God created it to be. In a sense, we can take the “ending” we hope for life in, with, and for God and make it a part of everyday of our individual stories. Imagine that. And so, my dear friends, there is no reason to wait embracing the new life God offers each of us. The time is now.