

I looked at today's readings and thought: well, I can talk about death or I can talk about money, and I think they'd rather hear me talk about death!

I always thought dying would be a struggle. But I had a revelation after my back surgery in April. In the recovery room, I kept hearing voices for around an hour: "Breathe Fr. John, breathe!" As much as I wanted them to let me alone and let me sleep, without that prompting, the monitors showed I would've slept to death; the opioids made it easy. Reflecting on this the next day, I realized that when most of us are near death, we'll be in a hospital or hospice, under opioids, where we'll relax ourselves to death, sleep to death. The last breath will be easy. I'm no longer afraid of dying. I hope this helps eliminate your fears, too.

I'd also like to eliminate your fears about what happens after that. We Christians believe in life after death. But so many practicing Catholics are afraid they're not going to make it to Heaven. Reject that thinking! Because look at what our readings show.

The First Reading says God didn't create death; He only created good; He created us to be imperishable. It says death entered the world through the envy of the devil. ... Envy is when we see someone else's gain as our loss. And Lucifer was envious of man and woman, God's perfect creation. In his hatred for God, he was determined to ruin man and woman in the same way he lost heaven: by tempting them with pride, persuading them they could be like God. It worked. Their sin ruptured our relationship with God, the Source of Life, and death was the result. ... But God didn't give up on us!

Jesus saw our loss as His loss, and He left aside all His glory in Heaven, and became human. He walked on earth, healing and restoring life. In our Gospel, He saved two women; one woman was practically dead; the other girl was dead. He gave them life and fullness of life: restored them to their community, and restored their ability to bring new life into the world.

Later, Jesus dies for us, so that his followers of all time can again have eternal life in God's kingdom. Jesus became the perfect sacrifice; He paid the price for all the sins of time and healed our rupture with God. And then, to Lucifer's chagrin, He conquers death with His Resurrection. He's Victor over death.

Once they see him risen, his remaining 11 cowardly apostles are transformed. They no longer fear death. They recognized that Jesus's Resurrection is salvation, that Jesus's victory is our victory. They knew they weren't perfect; they knew they were broken and sinners; and they knew, despite all that, Jesus would still raise them up. The Resurrection was a game-changer. It's all they could talk about!

So dismiss those thoughts that we won't get to heaven if we're not perfect, ... or because we're sinners, ... or because we would've, could've, should've done things differently. Deacon Corey put it so well three weeks ago: our entry into heaven isn't contingent on us being perfect. That'll never happen; we're all broken. God just wants to see progress, that we're continuing to cooperate with Him in living His way as Jesus reveals, that we're not just listening to Jesus's teachings but acting on them.

Death is the consequence of sin, but Jesus Christ has paid the price to undo its effects on us. Jesus is our champion. He cares about our lives now, flawed as we are. How can He not care about us after death. Eternal life with God is the end for every faithful, but imperfect, Christian.

Jesus wants to give Life. He shows us today through those two women that God wants everyone to be saved; that He will never abandon us; that He brings good out of evil; and that He has prepared a place for us in His kingdom.

To the woman with the hemorrhage Jesus says “Daughter, your faith has saved you.” To Jairus he says “Do not be afraid; just have faith.” Jesus’s words continue to touch us so we can reach out and heal others. ... Have confident faith in our resurrected life; let it lift up our spirits, and improve our lives. Let’s show and tell the people we know, who are living in darkness, what a difference the Good News of the Resurrection makes for us!

Fr. John Ozella, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 1, 2018