

Death is one of the hardest, if not the hardest, thing that we must deal with in this life. When someone we love dies, the pain of loss can be unfathomable. When we witness or hear about the scale of death that comes with things like war or famine or disease, it disturbs us greatly. Even in some instances can shake our faith. As we ponder our own death, fear wells up in us and many seek to postpone death at all costs.

Death, as we know, is a consequence of original sin. Because original sin disrupted the order of creation, death entered into the world. But this is not what God intended from the beginning. The first reading bears witness to death. From the Book of Wisdom: “God did not make death nor does He rejoice in the destruction of the living.” And God is not far, remote and uncaring about our sufferings when it comes to death. In fact, so compassionate is God concerning our plight that He was willing to take death upon himself, to experience death Himself by dying on the cross. How can we not be moved to profound trust in God in the faith of death as we ponder our Blessed Mother? Standing at the foot of the cross full of the most profound sorrow at the death of her son, and yet at the same time perfectly serene in trust of God.

But God even goes one step further than just experiencing death as we do, as profound as that is. He overcomes death and promises that we too His faithful ones will also overcome death – that death will not have the last word over us. In the Gospel story we see signs and promises of that. Beautiful story of the raising of this little girl and the words by which Jesus raises her – “talitha cum” – is the same Greek phrase that is used to describe the resurrection of Jesus Himself. In the light of our Christian faith in the power of Jesus’ resurrection and His desire to lead us through death to eternal life, we can begin to see death, not as an enemy, but even as a friend.

St. Francis of Assisi in his Canticle of the Sun would say “Be praised, my Lord, through our sister, bodily death.”

St. Ambrose would say that God has allowed death as a remedy. As good as this life can be at times without death, we would be stuck in this fallen sinful world forever – that wouldn’t be so good either.

St. Paul says “Life is Christ and death is gain.”

These are not just pious sayings, but show us the reality of hope that we have in Jesus and His power ultimately to save us from death and bring us to eternal life. This does not lessen necessarily the pain we experience in the face of death, but like with Mary at the foot of the cross, our Christian faith leads us to full serenity and confidence in God even as we at the same time may experience profound sorrow in the face of death. Jesus was not raised from the dead for no purpose – but to show us that He had conquered death.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 13th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 2012.