

**FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK**

Dear Parishioners,

*Some of you remarked that you found my homily last Sunday helpful so I'm printing it here*

When you reach a certain age it seems that every year you have to say “goodbye” to increasing numbers of loved ones and friends who have passed from this life. In that regard, this has been a momentous year for me. In February, my uncle, who is also a priest, Msgr. Ray Conley passed away at age 97. He was a great mentor to me for twenty-eight years and after a long life he was more than ready to meet the Lord. Still, it was hard for me to say “goodbye.” Then in April, on Holy Thursday, a good friend Father Bill Finch, died suddenly of a heart attack. We became friends in 1983 when we were in the seminary. He was only 55.

The passing of friends and family members always seems tragic. In our natural response to their passing we who love them experience a sense of loss. And I think because we feel a sense of loss when they are gone, we tend to think that somehow they themselves have lost something. That they have been lost to life. While this is quite natural reaction for us, Jesus Christ calls us to think again about the true meaning of life and death.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus proclaims: “whoever believes has eternal life...I am the bread of life...whoever eats this bread will live forever.” For Jesus, having life means far more than having a pulse. Having life means having a strong relationship with the living God. Death on the other hand is separation from God. When Jesus says He has come to bring us the fullness of life, He is telling us that He wants us to enjoy the fullness of relationship with Him and our Heavenly Father. Jesus wants to remove everything that weakens or destroys our relationship with God. When we allow Him to do this by obeying His teaching we have life in Christ.

To have life in Christ means living in the knowledge of God's enduring love with the certain hope that God will sustain us in every aspect of life. Life in Christ means living a life that enhances us, filled with trust, hope and joy. Life in Christ means living forever.

In Christ's teaching the opposite of being in communion with God is death. People who live indifferent to God's love and care, who give themselves over to sin are dead no matter how much they appear to be enjoying life now. They are dead men walking. It is also a form of death to live a life filled with fear and anxiety, being overburdened with cares and seeing no end to our problems because we have no real hope for the future. Just as Jesus came to free us from sin, He also came to free us from fear. So if we are always worried and anxious we should pray regularly for the faith to overcome our fears.

In proclaiming Himself the living Bread, Jesus invites us to come to Him and to be released from all the aspects of death that deprive of us of true life, most especially our sins. Jesus gives all who believe in Him the power to overcome both the death of the soul caused by sin as well as physical death. So even though we must pass from this world, we pass to new and greater life. Whether we are 97, 55 or 21 when we are called from this world, what does it matter? All of eternity waits for those who believe in Jesus Christ. We never die but live on in Him. And this new life He promises us begins here and now when we turn to Jesus in faith, trusting in His love and mercy for each of us. To give this truth visible expression, Jesus gives Himself to us in the Holy Eucharist, so that by giving us His very Body and Blood, He can fill us with Himself and we can experience the hope, peace and joy He wants us to have. This requires that we trust in the Lord.

Yes, the passing of those we love, when looked from the perspective of our physical nature, will always seem tragic because for they are no longer present to us as they used to be. However, we know that they are forever united to us and forever present to us because we share the Communion of the Body of Christ. So our fellow believers are never lost to us. For this reason we who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ can walk through this life with a sense of peace and expectation about our future days. Because, Jesus Christ, the living Bread who has come down from heaven, has given us His flesh so that we may have eternal life and that new life has begun even now. The only real tragedy in life is not to receive the salvation Christ offers us, not to become the saints he calls us to be.

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley