

## Living a New Life

June 28, 2020 - 13th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Cycle A

For many years I did not spend a lot of time and energy  
thinking about the second reading we read today.

But in the last few years this reading has taken on more and more importance in my life.

We know that when we are baptized we are given the promise of eternal life.

That is one of the foundational stones of our faith, and one I especially like.

But the part about being baptized into his death...that isn't very appealing.

Let me tell you about an experience I had...when I first started thinking about this reading.

When I was in the seminary I helped out with an RCIA in a parish in Portland Oregon.

There was a man--about 45 who was part of the process.

He had always been told he was baptized,

but when it came down to securing his baptismal certificate,

his mom finally told him he was never baptized...

which was okay, because we had prepared the whole group for baptism.

Now you need to remember that all adult baptisms take place during the Easter Vigil.

The tradition in that parish was one in which they filled a huge dark trough  
with about a foot of water.

The individual would ascend a set of steps up over the lip

and then descended steps down into the make-shift baptismal font,

kneel down,

and three times have a jug of water poured on them.

Then as they ascended out of the baptismal font,

the choir would break into a joyous Alleluia.

Everyone who was part of the RCIA group was prepared for this.

However, his mother was not part of the group,

and when she found out what her son had to do, she was livid.

What kind of convoluted Baptism was the Catholic Church doing?

Thankfully I was only a seminarian, and did not have to deal with her...

that's why priests get paid big bucks.

Needless to say the priest stayed the course.

After the Easter Vigil she came up to the priest and said,

after 65 years I finally understand what baptism is all about.

She saw her son walk--willingly,

into the dark baptismal font...into the tomb...into death...

and he rose triumphant.

He had been washed clean in the waters of baptism,

and as he was coming up out of the waters,

the choir was singing the heavenly alleluia,

there was no doubt in her mind that her son was now part of the communion of saints.

Now I was part of that process about 27 years ago, and it has affected the way I view baptism.

But for many years I still didn't like the part of being baptized into his death.

Probably because it meant that I would have to suffer.

And like most people I wanted the glory of resurrection, but I did not want pain of the cross.  
This COVID thing has taught me that you cannot have one without the other.

You see, we can do all kinds of things to protect ourselves from the corona virus...  
and for the most part Canadians, and especially Saskatchewan  
have been good at avoiding the virus.

But you would have to be a Neanderthal not to see how it has affected our world.

Whether we want it or not, we experience the pain of the Corona Virus...  
which itself is part of the pain of the cross.

Now I know there is no end in sight.

But I do know that it will not last forever,  
there will be a time when the Corona Virus will be something regulated to the history books,  
and we will all be able to move forward.

But not before many more people experience the pain and suffering of the cross.

I also believe that humanity will not only emerge victorious, but will actually triumph...  
meaning when all is said and done—we will be the better because of it.

Why...

1) The Corona Virus is teaching people to be more compassionate.  
It is teaching people that we cannot do whatever we want—  
what we do affects others.

This is especially true in our neighbours to the south...  
who are so intent on individual freedoms  
that individuals do not care that their actions may be  
endangering the lives of those around them.

And

2) Because the corona virus adversely affects the elderly,  
there has been an increase in the awareness and safety that is put on the elderly...  
focusing on their dignity.

It is interesting that we are busting our butts protecting our elderly,  
when only a few months ago...the push was towards euthanasia...killing them.

But back to the second reading...

For the past few chapters in the Letter to the Romans,  
Paul has been teaching that God saves us through grace.

In the reading today St. Paul continues to remind us  
that God saves us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We are made righteous, not by the righteousness of our own deeds,  
but by the righteous work of Christ's sacrificial love.

In the cross of Jesus, God has forgiven us even before we knew we needed to be forgiven.

The grace of God surrounds us.

We can't earn it...we can only trust it and welcome its power in our lives.

From time to time: 1) We lose jobs, 2) We give up routines,  
3) We watch our children grow and move away, 4) We change addresses,  
5) We lose marriages, 6) We mourn loved ones.

All of these losses are real and painful...

but all of them are a reminder that we cannot completely rise to new life,  
without letting go of the old life of death.

I love the fact the church has paired this reading with the gospel.

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.”

Put in the language of St. Paul it would read,

“Whoever is more concerned with the old life of death  
than the new life of resurrection is not worthy of me.”

At this time of year this spirituality is seen most clearly among the graduates.

Their graduation, put into the language of St. Paul would read,

“Whoever loves their school days more than they love their uncertain future,  
will never be able to move on.”

When I lived with then Fr. Albert LeGatt, he would always say,

“people would much rather live with the demon they know than the angels they do not know.”

Our faith is all about leaving our old lives behind,

leaving our sin behind, leaving our pride behind,

and moving into a glorious future with Christ.

As COVID 19 slowly, very slowly comes to an end, let us all rise to a new life in Christ.