

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME–2021

I came across one of Henny Youngman's more famous old doctor jokes: "A doctor gave a man six months to live. When the doctor found out that the man couldn't pay his bill, he gave him another six months." Without wanting or trying to be morbid, just imagine for a moment that it wasn't a joke and you found out from your doctor that you only had about six months to live. For sure it would change things in your life and your view of things. But what actually would you do differently? What would you do that you might have been putting off, thinking that, "One day I'll get to it?" I know it's a very hypothetical question, but it might be worth our while to reflect on it when you have a little quiet time.

We are quickly approaching the end of another liturgical year and our readings point us in the direction of the end times. We are reminded that there are limits to life and that we, our loved ones and our world will not be around forever. While I don't believe that the end of the world will come during our life time, the reality of our own personal death and the death of those around us is something that *will* happen in our life time. It's a reality from which no one can escape.

But let's get back to the question: If you knew your time was short, what would change? Again, while hypothetical, answering the question might help us to see what we actually need to do or need change, even if we are going to be around for a longer time. Death is usually not a topic of our normal everyday conversations and we live in a society that tries very hard to deny the reality of death, sometimes focusing too much on the present or trying to scare us to make sure that we have enough put away for the future. Rarely do we hear anything about making sure that the other important areas of our life are taken care of. At this moment in our lives, what can we say about our relationship with God and others? Are we investing enough time and energy into those areas that really determine our happiness and the quality of our lives? We are reminded today that life is very fragile and that, in the end, you never know. We all know how many times each day people begin the day and leave for work or whatever and never make it home. Just imagine what it must be like in those countries like Syria where life can be so uncertain for people just doing normally every day things. How precious each day must be for them. While things might not be so dramatic or uncertain for us, that doesn't take away from the specialness of each day.

Again, I'm really not trying to be a downer—just the opposite, in the sense that there is so

much we can do now that will make a positive difference in our lives and the lives of others even though things around us might not always be great. Taking care of the present is the best way to take care of the future, a future that will not have any regrets or “if only’s.” How do we know what to do or what to change?

In the Gospel today, Jesus tells us to be aware of what is going on around us and to see the signs in order to see what’s really there. What are some of those signs? I return to some of the questions that I have been posing over the past few weeks. Very important and close to home is how we feel on the inside. What is my basic attitude right now? Am I optimistic, hopeful, content, grateful, etc.? Do I feel fulfilled in what I am doing? Do I feel at home in my family and with my friends? In spite of the busyness that makes up most of our lives, am I taking care of myself and my own personal needs? Are there people in my life right now that I need to make peace with before it’s too late? We know how important our spiritual life is—are we really taking care of it and spending enough time with the Lord? These are some of the things that we can look at in order to see what needs to be done or changed. While people can help us and support us, even point out some of the signs to us, it’s up to each of us to make it happen.

As we get ready for a new church year, let’s all spend some time looking at the signs and what they are telling us. Little by little, as we continue on our journey, hopefully we will be able to end up with the same attitude as St. Francis de Sales who was asked while playing a game of cards (yes, a saint playing cards), he was asked “What would you do if you knew you had only an hour to live?” Very much at peace with himself, with the Lord and the world, he said, “I’d continue playing cards.” May we have that same peace and confidence in our hearts.