

7th Saturday of Easter

June 4, 2022

Georgetown Class of '87 Memorial Mass

Readings 302

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31;

Ps. 11; Jn. 21:20-25

INTRO: Memories are powerful. Maybe you're finding like me this weekend that memories from 35, even 39 years ago are still pretty vivid. We gather today, on this penultimate day of the Easter season, the eve of Pentecost, to remember especially our classmates who have died. We believe that for them "life is changed, not ended."

Let's begin our celebration of the Eucharist by asking the Lord to help us remember the ways in which we still need change still at this point in our own lives. We turn to him for mercy...

HOMILY: Not that much has changed on the Hilltop, has it? Here we are in Dahlgren. John Carroll is still seated inside the front gate. Planes overhead are still following the path of the Potomac. Wisely's remains open for business, and Fr. Otto Hentz and Jack DeGioia are still on campus. Russia is as much on our minds today as it was when many of you were up for 8AM Russian classes in 1983-84. Our class is still turning out in force.

On the other hand, the ICC is hardly the new building on campus like it was when we first arrived. Dorms like New North and St. Mary's have long been re-purposed. In the NCAA, Gonzaga and St. Peter's are the big Jesuit schools lately. Not too many Hoyas live off-campus anymore, and for current students "getting online" means something very different from waiting to be admitted to the pub. If I recall, the chief context for discussions about racism in our day involved apartheid in South Africa. Today they involve grappling with Georgetown's history of slaveholding and with violence in our own country.

To live always involves change.

In the Jesuit world, this has been a big year. It's called the Ignatian Year – and that logo on the rear of your Mass program ties the name of St. Ignatius Loyola to the number 500. It's not the 500th anniversary of his birth or his death. It's the 500th anniversary of a moment that changed his life. As he led a doomed effort to defend the city of Pamplona, Spain against French invaders on May 21, 1521, his leg was shattered by a cannonball. Ignatius was forced to put his dreams of soldiering and courtly life aside.

What began was an entirely new pilgrimage that eventually led him and a band of friends to found the Society of Jesus. Think for a moment: Whether yours was so dramatic or not, have you ever had that sort of “cannonball moment”?

I said earlier, for the dead “life is changed, not ended.”

The Scripture readings today are both endings; but let me suggest that they’re also about change. As the Easter season comes to a close, we hear from the last chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. St. Paul is in prison in Rome, where he’ll ultimately be martyred. But we’re told that he remained confident in the promise of Resurrection and “*without hindrance he proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.*” His encounter with Christ, of course, had transformed him from a chief persecutor of Christians to a great apostle.

We also hear today the conclusion of the Gospel of John and the testimony that there was simply not room in one book for all the good things Jesus had done. The last encounter John describes is between Jesus and St. Peter, shortly before Jesus ascends to the Father. Peter is wondering about rumors that St. John – with whom he had run to the tomb on Easter morning in light of St. Mary Magdalene’s news – rumors that John would not die. Notice how Jesus doesn’t actually answer Peter’s question.

Jesus tells Peter, “What concern of that is yours? *You follow me.*” He’s challenging Peter to think differently – not by human standards – but to be focused solely on Jesus. That doesn’t mean we Christians should ignore the world. Far from it. It invites us to engage the world from a new perspective – as we are saying during the Ignatian year – to engage the world in the spirit of St. Ignatius, “to see all things new in Christ.”

Naturally we should care about whether others live or die – and we obviously do – but not as a curiosity or as some measure for comparison of our fate to theirs. We care for their lives, because God gave to them and to us relationships of love and affection. He gave us those relationships with the goal that ultimately we’ll all share in the promise of Easter, which is nothing less than a share in God’s own divine life won for us by Christ!

Are our deceased classmates here with us? Of course. Just as Christ's own Spirit is here with us, and not only for this weekend. We don't perceive them the same way as we did here on campus in the '80s, but because their lives have "changed not ended", they are still part of God's one, ultimate reality, as are we.

This is what we Catholics, we Christians mean when we profess belief in the "communion of saints." It's not limited to the saints who've been formally canonized. It's about the entire Body of Christ, souls living and deceased. We remain united in the Lord, who fully entered *time and space and death* precisely to overcome the limits of *time and space and death*! Please listen to Bill McGarvey's meditation song after Communion with exactly that in mind.

Let me conclude on a note of practical spirituality. It's about funerals, but it's meant to be a hopeful note, not morose. In recent years we've begun to use the phrase 'celebration of life' in addition to – or in place of – 'funeral.' Of course, we want to celebrate a person's life as part of the grieving process. But in my experience, some 'celebrations of life' look *only* to the past. They give the impression that a person's life has 'just plain ended', and then they become *only* about our memories. If that's where we stop, we risk forgetting to pray for the ones we've loved, and even to *pray to them*. Celebrations like that miss the horizon of eternity and effectively exclude hope. And by our very Baptism we are a people of hope.

So when we lose someone, let's remember, let's mourn, and let's look to that eternal horizon where we'll share life with them again... share life in a way that, right now, we can't even begin to imagine!