

32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Cycle C

November 7, 2010

St. Margaret Parish, Bel Air

Back in the summer of 2009, I served as one of the priest chaplains for a large group of people visiting the Middle East. On the ten-day trip we visited Egypt and saw the magnificent pyramids near Cairo. These pyramids are made of large blocks of stone, they stand about 2,000 feet high and were built almost 4,000 years ago – they are amazing! At the bottom of each pyramid, there is a burial chamber for a pharaoh. This, of course, was why each pyramid was built. In the burial chamber, along with the mummy of the pharaoh, they would place food, drink, clothing, jewelry, and even the bodies of deceased slaves. They thought that all of this would help the pharaoh in the after-life. These ancient people believed that the pharaoh would live on in some way after death. The pyramids are a very dramatic expression of that belief.

Each of us has this desire for life. There is embedded within us a hunger for ongoing or eternal life. It is part of who we are as human beings. I look at this hunger or drive as being planted in us by God at the moment of creation. Or we might say that it is evidence of the eternal life of God that we share through the act of creation. However we understand it, Jesus responds to this hunger and tells us something about it. In today's readings, there are three messages that help to clarify our understanding.

First, Jesus reveals that life beyond this earth will be different from this life. Some of the religious leaders in today's gospel pose a ridiculous example to discredit Jesus' teaching about resurrection. Jesus responds that life "*in the age to come*" or "*resurrection*" will be different from this. It will not just be a continuation of this life. We cannot apply our experience of life now to this new life. Resurrection will be a new and transformed way of life, another level of being or living. It will be an experience where we clearly and directly will be with God.

And that takes us to Jesus' second message: this life beyond death will happen because of an ongoing relationship. Many of us have experienced the pain of losing a loved one. We know that at death, our love does not end. We continue to love and in that way the relationship is ongoing. Well, Jesus' message is that resurrection or life beyond death is based on the

nature of God who is pure love. God's love for us is absolute and complete. And because of this love, because of who God is, our relationship with God will continue beyond death. It is because of this that we will continue and that there will be resurrection. This is exactly why the brothers in today's first reading are willing to die rather than violate their faith. They trust in God and in an ongoing relationship and life with this loving God. This love will transform us and draw us to a new level of life.

And that brings us to Jesus' third message: this hope of future resurrection brings us a new, present energy for life. This hope energizes us to address hopelessness and hostility and injustice and to bring life itself where there is death in any of its forms. This is exactly what it does for Jesus. Jesus is so one with the Father and with the transcendent life beyond this earth that he has energy even as he dies on the cross. He is able to say "*Father, forgive them*" and "*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*" The idea is that the promise of future resurrection gives us a present energy for dealing with the challenges and complexities and adversities of human life. And in that, we live out right now the different life and ongoing relationship that we will have with God.