

November 6, 2016 The Resurrection of the Body Homily:

Brothers and sisters, one of the most disturbing, indeed horrifying, images of the Second World War is likely known to many of you. So gruesome is the image that I am reluctant to even mention it. It is the graphic image of a bulldozer pushing hundreds of corpses into a mass grave inside the concentration camp, where Jews and others were imprisoned. Badly mistreated in life, they were shown utter disrespect in death. Clearly the intent was to destroy any evidence that they even existed. Erasing their names from the Book of Life was one of their motives for such a sinister act of negligence. How many perished without any hope in eternal life, without any faith in the resurrection from the dead. Not so the Jews justly praised in today's Old Testament reading.

In today's first reading, a persecuted Jew is prepared to lay down his life. He knows the power of God. He exclaims: "It is my choice to die at the hands of man with the hope God gives of being raised by Him". In today's gospel reading, The Sadducees attempt to embarrass Our Lord. Basing their teaching on the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) they reject belief in life after death. Jesus assures them that "the dead will rise" and that one can find evidence of such a belief in the Torah itself. For God "is not the God of the dead but of the living". There exists a permanent relationship between God and the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who have been dead for years. Although these righteous men have died as far as their bodies are concerned they are alive in God and are awaiting the resurrection of their bodies.

In his reflections on the gospel the current Archbishop of Vienna, Christoph Schonborn, points out that under Communism, the state was officially atheistic and, as a consequence, forbade any form of religious belief. In East Germany, the dead were not buried... They were merely discarded like old, worn out shoes. Schonborn goes on to say that if there is neither a God nor the hope of eternal life, why bother with a funeral. He writes, "For centuries, the dignified burial of the body who had died had to do with the belief that on the last day the dead will rise, not only the souls of the faithful departed for evermore, but the body, too, will one day rise again".

For years I have perused the daily death notices in the local newspaper. Nowadays, what I find most disheartening are the increasing number of families who choose not to have a religious service for their deceased loved ones. Very often there is no mention whatsoever of the religious sentiments of the deceased and, not surprisingly, no mention of life beyond the grave. Living in a secular post-Christian culture has many drawbacks, but the most disturbing one of all is the lack of interest in eternal life and the absence of a living faith in God the creator and sustainer of life.

In the ancient creed of the Church, the Apostles Creed, we recite boldly the words, "I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. In the gospel reading Our Lord offers us a message of hope and great consolation. That joyful message is one reason why the Christian church is a church of martyrs!

Amen!