

Today's readings and this homily focus on something we generally find uncomfortable to think about – death. Indeed this whole virus epidemic is bringing the idea of death too close for many people. So I start with a censorship note. This sermon is classified 'U' for Uncomfortable because we will be looking at death very closely. If this is a bit too close to home at the moment then, by all means, avoid the elephant in the room and go read something else. However the readings also lead us through that great shroud to resurrection; so this is also classified at 'H' for hopeful.

Have any of you seen 'The Walking Dead'? Perhaps one of the many zombie films that seem to have become popular recently? I suspect the younger ones among you will know exactly what I am talking about – for you older members of our church family think; The Mummy, Dracula or perhaps Frankenstein. The idea of continuing after death is hardly a new idea nor is the idea of 'not quite dying'. It seems to me that the idea of 'not quite dying' has become more and more popular as humanity turns away from faith and embraces secularism and living only for this life. After all if you have no belief in the next life what have you to hope for? The end is indeed The End! So we create for ourselves an alternative – the dream? nightmare? – of living without the consequence of life – death.

This new alternative vision is, I believe, responsible for the conversion of vampires from the 'cursed undead' into the 'dreamy immortal' as seen in Twilight and its ilk. What was once seen as being horrifying; a lost soul unable to rest or find peace; has become something to be desired. The promise of eternal youth and strength without worrying about what might be next. No one dreams of becoming a zombie (all that rotting flesh and eternal bad hair days) and yet that is what the traditional vampire is – a creature without hope and with a continual hunger for the living. Instead they have made them 'human' they have given them life without that great scary beast death!

But what is this life without death? People never really look at that question. Imagine living – truly living – for 100 years, not bad eh. Even 500 years – sounds good, you'd see a few changes but nothing unmanageable. What about 1000 years? 5000 years? Life without death is just ... continuing. Besides where would we put everyone? There are currently 7.8 BILLION of us at the moment even though we find new and exciting ways to kill each other. There's more but I will leave it there for now.

We have always been afraid of death and dying; which is where this page started. As an atheist you believe in nothing; this is easy to do as a young person (I speak from experience) but becomes more challenging as you grow older and are required to say an eternal goodbye to those that you love. Not impossible just more challenging. You can veer on the side of caution and be agnostic (believe in something more but not actually define it) or, you can chose faith; and my there are a lot of faiths to choose from!

Don't panic! I am not going to go through them all. I will simply say that after having had a close look at many of them, I chose Christianity and, I hope because you are reading this, you have done the same.

Christianity looks fully into the face of death; our Saviour, after all, died for us; and yes we do believe in life after death – (for more details see another sermon, this is going on a bit already) – but most of all we believe in RESURRECTION. Mostly we use this as a term to describe Jesus' return to life on Easter Day after his crucifixion, but that is not its full meaning. Resurrection is not just a passage into heaven moment; it is one of the core beliefs of Christianity, it is something for us to embrace in this life not just to get to the next.

A few weeks ago I spoke about how every moment can be a new beginning with God, that we don't have to carry our past burdens with us. For those of you who missed it ☹️. Resurrection is, if you like, what is on offer when we do die to our old life; not just put it behind us – because that is still in reach and we do have a tendency to pick up our burdens again. Resurrection is New Life, and a new beginning BUT, to do that, we MUST DIE to our old life first. That is the thing that so many of us find hard to do. We clasp hold of our old life as if it wasn't the thing that caused us the pain in the first place. We say we want a new life with God but we keep on living the old life and wonder why nothing seems to have changed. It's like putting on a costume – we may look like Superman or Wonder Woman (or superhero of your choice) but it is the same us underneath. We may look like Christopher Lee or one of the Twilight gang but, in reality, we are still shuffling zombies.

Paul calls it 'living in the flesh'. What he means is letting all the stuff that causes us emotional and spiritual pain to rule our lives. Dying to the old life, to the worldly ways, is a recurring theme in Paul's writings. Jesus puts it simpler 'Follow me'.

If you truly do want your spirit to fly let go of the old you, with all its frustrations, fears, prejudices, anger and sorrows, and let it die. All those things that make you feel worthless, broken and empty; ways of living that don't actually make you feel alive but already half dead. Pray and ask God to help you – he will – but it needs to be you that takes the step, God will never force anything on you, even when it is for your own good. Then take up the new you, born again, and see the world differently: what once deadened the pain, becomes unnecessary; the angry words you used, pointless; the exhausting defences you built, joyfully left to ruin. Jesus doesn't say that you have to wait for heaven to have a new life, he tells us that we can have that new life NOW. Seriously, what do you have to lose? Be free and soar!

God's blessing on you all – Tracy