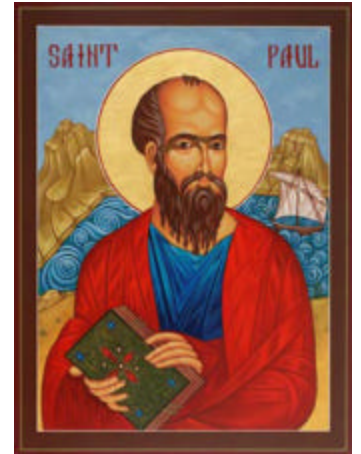


25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
21 September 2008  
Catechetical Sunday

## LESSON: Christ Is the Meaning of Life and Death

St Paul wrote his Letter to the Philippians while he was **in prison**, in **Rome**, just a year or two before his martyrdom.

- ✍ His faith had already been **tested** by extensive **suffering and persecution**, and he had acquired the **wisdom of holiness**.
- ✍ In the section of the Letter that we just listened to – part of the Word of God in the Sacred Scriptures, we find one of the most precious **pearls** of this wisdom, a summary of what every human heart **longs to know**: the **meaning of life**.
- ✍ St Paul writes, "For to me life is Christ, and death is gain."



This mysterious phrase shows that our **relationship with Christ** does something that no other religion or philosophy or human relationship can: it **unifies** what we do **here on earth** and what we will do **after death**.

- ✍ In the ancient **pagan religions**, death was the great destroyer.
- ✍ They believed in life after death, but it was a **shadow life**, meaningless and joyless – just a journey on the River Styx.



- ✍ In the great eastern religions, existence in this world is **pain and suffering**, and a good death puts an end to the **pain** by putting an end to the individual's **existence** – only to be “reincarnated” – re-en-fleshed – until you finally get it right.

But in Christianity, Christ has **broken down the barrier between life and death**.

- ✍ The **friendship with Christ** that we live here on earth through prayer, the sacraments, and our efforts to build up his Kingdom, **is** the beginning of eternal life.
- ✍ And **death** is like the birth of a child - it is our **emergence** from the **womb of time** into the beautiful, limitless horizons of **eternity**.
- ✍ Through friendship with Christ, we are no longer **aimlessly waiting around** in the town square, like the workers in the Gospel,

- ✍ **distracting ourselves** and **passing the time** as pleasantly as we can, hoping that someone will come along and give us a **purpose**.
- ✍ We have become **workers in the vineyard of the Lord**, and our work is earning an **indescribable reward** in heaven.
- ✍ And it is the Word of God – the Sacred Scriptures – with its witness and promise and hope – that brings this depth of true meaning into our lives.

Today the Church in the United States celebrates “Catechetical Sunday” – and the theme for this year is “The Word of God” – calling us to focus on the Sacred Scriptures – on the Word of God contained there in the Bible. (Remember how Fr. Thoms told you to “get out your Bibles?” Here it is again!)



We are reminded today of the role that Catechists – teachers – play in the development of our lives of faith.

- ✍ We probably all remember that religious Sister from CCD or Catholic school (I remember Sr. Marie St. William – whom we affectionately called “Sr. Bill.”)
- ✍ We all remember some true “nugget” that they shared with us as WE were growing up in the faith.
- ✍ We all remember the role our parents played in helping us to grow in and learn our Catholic Faith.

Today, we recognize, commission and thank our parish catechists who continue to share our rich Faith – and the message of faith which gives ultimate meaning to our lives – with others:



- ✍ The teachers in our Catholic Schools – whether they be Catholic or not – who by daily example, common prayer, and classroom instruction share the joys of Christian living with the young people who attend our parish school
- ✍ The teachers and aids in our parish CCD program – who volunteer their time and talent to share the faith which they have come to know and live with YOUR children.
- ✍ The instructors in our parish RCIA program – who by

witness, prayer and instruction “love others” into the Church

- ✍ Those who lead our parish Bible Study program – helping us to delve into the “Word of God” in all its richness and joy – especially in this “Year of St. Paul.”

These people, and others, work and sacrifice to do “Catechesis” – to teach and share the joys of our faith with others.

Actually, we do catechesis every Sunday. The purpose of the homily each week is to break open the “Word of God” and share one way that it might be relevant to our lives today – Sacred

Scripture is ALWAYS relevant, but the homily tries to expound on ONE way it might impact our lives. So, let's do some catechesis...

## ILLUSTRATION: What "to depart" Really Means (a word study)

One of the **words** St. Paul uses in today's 2<sup>nd</sup> reading brings this ultimate meaning of life into very **sharp focus**.

Paul knows that there is chance he will be **executed** - faithful Christians refused to give worship to the Roman emperors or other State gods, and so they could be charged with the **capital crime of treason**.

- ✍ As he awaits his **trial**, he is wondering to himself whether he would prefer to be **executed now**, or to be **let free** so that he can **continue working** for the good of the Church.
- ✍ He is "caught between the two," he writes.
- ✍ Part of him wants to **stay and continue working** for the good of his brothers and sisters.
- ✍ But another part of him wants to "**depart** this life and be with Christ."

And that's the key word: "**depart**."

The Greek word (analuein) is much more **vivid**.

- ✍ It was the word used for **striking camp**, for taking down the **tents**, packing up the **bags**, and moving on – just like packing up your camp site – which is temporary – and returning to your permanent home.
- ✍ It was also the word used for **leaving port**, for untying the **mooring ropes**, pulling up the **anchors**, raising the **sails**, and putting out to sea.
- ✍ It was also the word used for **solving problems**, for **untangling the knots** that confuse us and hold us back from the **fullness** of happiness and wisdom that we were created for.



For St Paul, life on earth

- ✍ is a **temporary thing**, a **camping out** along the way to our everlasting home;
- ✍ it is a **preparation** for the wonderful **journey and adventure** of eternal life;
- ✍ it is a time to **show our stuff** by being faithful to Christ in the **midst of problems**, so that our hearts are trained for the **fullness of love** in heaven.

That's the **Christian** vision of life, the **true** vision, the **meaningful** vision - the **vision** we all should have – the vision our Catechists seek to bring to our young people and all those they teach.

## **APPLICATION: Living Sunday Right**

Today, we can all ask ourselves if we **share St Paul's passion for Christ**, if we share his **eager desire** to be with Christ forever in heaven – and how we strive to **share** that desire through our teaching with others – through our catechesis.

SO many HUNGER for this peace we find in the Word of God – so MANY long to discover this ultimate meaning to life – and our Catechesis seeks to bring it to the world through our teaching and also through our example – the example of EACH ONE of us here. Every week at Mass, right after the Our Father, the priest prays on behalf of the people:

- ✍ "...protect us from all anxiety, as we **wait in joyful hope** for the coming of our Savior..."
- ✍ St Paul was **waiting with joyful hope**. Are we?
- ✍ We **should** be. Jesus **wants** us to.
- ✍ He has revealed to us that our **efforts** to follow him are **not in vain** - we, like the workers in today's Gospel parable, will be **rewarded** for our fidelity.
- ✍ Imagine the witnesses we would be to the world if we lived like St. Paul – a concern – not for life or death – but only to do what GOD wants – to fulfill the mission HE has for us and our lives.



One reason that the Church **forbids** us from doing **unnecessary work** on Sundays and encourages us to spend time not only in **worship**, but also **servicing** our neighbor and **relaxing** with friends and family is **precisely** so that we can keep this "joyful hope" **fresh**.

- ✍ During the week, we are so **busy**, so engaged in our earthly work, which is good and necessary, that sometimes our fire of joyful hope **burns low**.
- ✍ On Sundays, we need to **add wood to that fire**, reminding ourselves that **all we do has a purpose**, that our lives have a glorious, indescribably fulfilling **destination**.

During this Mass, we commission our Catechists and bless them and their work, as they seek to bring the message of Christ's peace to others.

But each of US has our **own role** to play. Let's each **help** in the work of catechesis by our witness. Today, during this Mass, as Jesus renews his **promise** to prepare a place for us in his Father's house, let's **renew our faith** in him.

- ✍ And when we receive him in **Holy Communion**, let's **turn our hearts towards heaven**, savoring **now** the joy we **hope** to experience **later**.
- ✍ And let's spend the rest of the day **continuing** to savor it, and **helping** those around us savor it, turning our Sundays into **little heavens on earth**.
- ✍ That will get us ready to live the **rest of the week** courageously, conducting ourselves, as St Paul described it, "in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ."

