

Pro-Cathedral / Donnybrook

26/27 June 2021

Introduction

Welcome again, everybody. There is a mediaeval mystery play called *Everyman*. Quite early in the drama, Death appears and summons our hero, Everyman, and the reaction is full of pathos and humour. The first thing Everyman says is, "O death, thou comest when I had thee least in mind." Then he attempts to bribe Death a thousand pounds, with the words, "defer this matter to another day." Of course, there is no deferring! Because of our experience of the pandemic, we need no wake-up call: we have become familiar with unpredictability and mortality and we know about untimely death and chronic illness, as seen in today's Gospel.

Topic

What does faith have to say to the fact of death, the possibility of life and the hope for a hereafter?

Steps

In our biblical tradition, death is taken seriously. This is very clear from the first reading today:

Death was not God's doing,
he takes no pleasure in the extinction of the living.
To be - for this he created all;
the world's created things have health in them,
in them no fatal poison can be found.

At the same time, there is an awareness of the sadness of inevitable death. In the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, there is a very touching poem on the decline of old age, ending with the words,

...before the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:6-7)

A modern Jewish poet, Joseph Leftwich, has offered a very different way to looking at death and life. The poem is called, *Death is not strange*.

Death is not strange.
Strange is life,
That flesh can think.
And body believe,

That dust can sing;
That a clod of earth

For one's lifetime
Can house God.

That dead things live
When touched by God's breath,
Is the miracle,
Not death.

To this combination of tragedy and wonder, we bring our central proclamation as Christians is: *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.*

St Paul is the great teacher of hope and he affirms as follows: *We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.* (Romans 6:9) and *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.* (1 Corinthians 15:20). *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.* (Romans 8:11)

Because of Jesus' victory over death, we do believe in our own resurrection with him. If we take this conviction really to heart, it does set us free in a double sense. We are set *free from*: from fear of death, from the power of death and from the absurdity of final extinction. We are also set *free for*: for living fully now, for loving and for giving without counting the cost. Contrary to much Christian tradition, our belief in the hereafter is a much about life before death as it is about life after death. Because there is life after death, life here and now is worth living, living fully and deeply.

Conclusion

All this is by way of reflection on our Gospel today, the double story of the woman with the haemorrhage and the daughter of Jairus. This Gospel, too, points beyond itself to the Christ-event as a whole, to Jesus' own resurrection. We are not being asked whether we believe that once-upon-a-time Jesus raised a little girl from the dead, but we are challenged to believe that once-for-all-time God raised Jesus from the dead. Amen. Alleluia.