

Homily for the First Sunday of Advent

If you ask me now what my favorite type of music is, I'd tell you Contemporary Christian music and Country music. But, that wasn't always the case. The fact is, I grew up on Country music; but, I didn't much like it. And while the rest of the world was listening to 80's pop, I was listening to Alabama, The Judds, and George Strait on car rides to grandma's house. I actually kind of teased my family for listening to Country music. But, then what happened when I got older? Well, I started liking it!

About 15 years ago a Country music artist, Tim McGraw, had a song out called, *Live Like You Were Dying*, which is essentially about a man in his early 40s finding out that he has a terminal illness. And, in response to such devastating news, he doesn't just curl up into a ball and wait to die. But rather, he goes skydiving and Rocky Mountain climbing, and riding a bull named Fumanchu. But, he also does things like be the husband that most the time he wasn't, and become a friend a friend would like to have. He read the Good Book. And, he took a good, long, hard look.

Now, of course we've all heard that phrase before "to live like we're dying". But, as I was thinking about it yesterday, we all really are dying. Yes, some of us will have 80 plus years more; but most of us have much less. And so, if we are in fact dying, are we living like we're dying? Or, are we living like we're not? Do we acknowledge that everything we think, do, and say will be adjudicated by the Lord? Or, do we live as though this life were "it", and it doesn't much matter what I think, do, and say – I just want to eat, drink, and be merry?

St. Benedict, the father of western monasticism, would frequently remind his monks “to think upon death”. In fact, he’s often depicted in Christian art with a skull for this very reason. Now, lest you think that that St. Benedict had a morbid fascination with death – no. Actually, it was out of charity that he wanted to speak the truth to them. This holy man sought to instruct them to intentionally live their lives with judgment in mind, realizing that they would each meet God face to face. And, as Jesus warns us in the Gospel today: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the Lord is coming... May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.”

Now, such advice from St. Benedict or teachings of Jesus in the Gospel, are not meant to scare us into submission – living good lives, because we’re afraid of God’s wrath. To the contrary, God wants us to know personally how much He loves us, so that that love can make a real difference in how we live. When we experience how much God loves us, we will want to respond more and more with love, not sin. And the more we live a life of loving God and loving others aright, is the degree that we are being prepared for the Kingdom of God – God, who is love. Otherwise, to the degree that we are not ready, as I said last week, we will have to undergo that final purification in purgatory.

To truly live like we are dying means that we have our priorities in right order. And, if in fact, how we loved in this life is the criteria upon which we’ll be judged in the next, then it seems to me that we want to make establishing loving relationships with God and others as our chief focus in the time we have remaining.

In the words of Tim McGraw – focus on being the husband or wife that your spouse deserves; and, be a friend to others, such as you would want to have. Parents, spend quality time with your children; don't let technology always be the baby-sitter, or work take up all your time. Married couples, tell each other that you love the other; and then show it in a self-sacrificial way. Give God the first fruits of your day, by spending meaningful time with Him in prayer. Let us be generous with our time, and give to others in their need. And let us remember, it is because God is love that we can even love others. It's because He has first loved us that we can love others selflessly.

And, let us heed the words of St. Paul from today's second reading: "I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way...so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." God bless you.