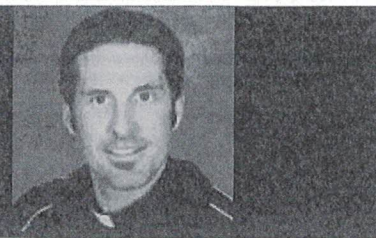


A Word From Fr. Tom Niehaus

November 10, 2019



Resurrection of the Dead Jesus said to them, “The children of this age marry and remarry; but those who are deemed worthy to attain to the coming age and to the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. They can no longer die for they are like angels; and they are the children of God because they are the ones who will rise (Luke 20:34-36).” This week’s Gospel reveals the Lord’s approach to teaching the Sadducees the correct understanding of the resurrection. The Sadducees were a Jewish sect in the time of Jesus, who denied the resurrection of the dead based on their strict observance to the written law. Because of their understanding of the written law found in the Old Testament part of the Bible, the Sadducees had a limited capacity to accept the New Teaching of Jesus concerning the Resurrection of the Body and life everlasting because it came from His mouth. Jesus refutes the misinformed concept of the Resurrection held by the Sadducees and then argues on behalf of the Resurrection of the dead using the written law of the Old Testament speaking to the hearts of those in His presence. Essentially for the reader of this week’s scripture, the one who believes in Jesus, is baptized, loves God & neighbor and remains faithful to Him, upon death that one will not have to taste eternal death. Therefore, everything that formerly applied to them in their life on earth no longer applies to the one who is with the angels in heaven. Life as we knew it on earth, does not matter in the same way, because after a believing Christian dies, they will be in the presence of the Lord forever, receiving for eternity that which is greater than anything we can know or experience on earth. Pray for the grace to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, even unto death.

Remembering the Dead Serving as a newly ordained priest in the Winona area was a great joy. Having spent the better part of 3 years in that city as the assistant at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart & St. Casimir Parish and director of the St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Newman Center at Winona State University, there are many memories from that assignment I thank God for. The other priests in the Winona area parishes took Monday off for rest and renewal and I took Thursday as my day off, therefore, I became the priest for all of Winona each Monday. The fall of my third year in Winona was a gorgeous one and I had spent the better part of an October Monday tending to the needs of the students at Winona State University. In the evening I took a stroll along East Lake Winona and marveled at the beauty of the hills that were painted in various colors and hues of orange, yellow, brown and red. That night as I was about to go to bed, I received an emergency call from the hospital, so I gathered my sick call bag and drove to the Winona hospital. It was there that I learned of a young man who was in a car accident in the hills south of Winona. Arriving at the hospital, I saw some members of the family connected to the accident gathering together in the hospital lobby together with medical staff and Winona County Sheriff Dave Brand. I made a little small talk with the family and then noticed Sheriff Brand motioning for me to come near. I went over by Sheriff Brand and he asked me if I was ready for something difficult. He and I went with one of the medical staff into a room where a young man was laid out on a medical table. He was covered in a black bag with his head visible. My heart sank and began to ache for the family. “Who is he?” I mumbled. Sheriff Brand responded, “Owen. He is a college kid from Houston, MN. Drove off the road” “Does the family know that he is dead?” I asked Sheriff Brand. “No. Do you want to tell them or have me tell them,” Sheriff Brand asked me. “I know the boy’s aunt out there, let me deliver them the news. First let’s say a prayer and blessing,” I said to him. Sheriff Brand stood back a few steps, I got out my purple stole and book of prayers for the dead and began to pray for Owen. At the end of the prayers, I blessed his body with holy water and commended him to God. Sheriff Brand then zipped the body bag up and we walked out into the waiting room together. I asked the family to gather together and told them that Owen had died as the result of injuries sustained in a car accident. The family began to cry and sob. People began to hug and others slumped into the waiting room couches in disbelief. This young man who seemingly had such a bright future ahead of him, now his family covered in the darkness of death. After some time of crying and hugging and sobbing and wailing. I gathered the family together and led the rosary which we prayed for Owen. This was a moment of peace in the midst of a surreal situation laden with shock and grief. As I went back to the Cathedral rectory at an early morning hour that day, my heart was hurting for the family and my prayers were for them and the young man who had died. I share that story because God put me in that situation to pray for that young man and his family. I still think about that situation. That was the first time that I blessed a dead person immediately after a tragic accident and I have done so numerous times since. But my thoughts turn in hope to the Lord who tells us to be ready for a time and hour we do not know about when the Son of Man will return. To be ready at any moment to meet the Lord must be my preparation, and a message I must share with others. Death is difficult for people to deal with especially if they do not have faith in Jesus Christ or a healthy understanding of heaven. Maybe you or someone you know struggles with grief over the death of a loved one. Bringing some closure and peace to that situation might include praying for the deceased person, talking to a friend or counselor or priest about a loved one who has died, taking time to visit the grave of the loved one or having the Holy Mass said for their intention. Whatever our encounter has been with death, we know that through Jesus Christ the victory over the death has been won and that sin and death do not have the final say. When praying for someone who has died, let us pray together: Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen. May their souls and the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.

God bless you!

Fr. Tom Niehaus