

33A 2017 SML
MT 25:14-30

Life is short, death is certain, and eternity is long. Life is short, death is certain, and eternity is long. Those are the words that come to mind in a powerful way this (evening) morning, in light of the gospel that we have just heard, which is a sobering gospel. We have a challenge with it and the challenge is with God, not with me. They are His words, not mine; I am just as challenged by these words as you are. So let's reflect upon them, so our ears will be open to what He wishes to say to us, you, me, all of us. What does He want us to hear?

The opening phrase was spoken by St. John Cardinal Newman, an Englishman back in the 19th century and from the first time I read it, I remember being taken by its succinctness and its power. Life is short. Death is certain. And eternity is long.

Like many of you, I am at an age when many people I have known in my life are no longer alive. I've heard since I was young the reality of death. But when we're young, it doesn't mean much to us. I remember looking through my

parents' wedding album with my mother years ago, and asking, "Who's this?" He's dead. "And who's this?" She's dead. And I didn't think twice about it. But now, as I look through my ordination album, and think to myself, "He's dead . . . she's dead:" my Mom and Dad, members of my family, friends, they have come to understand what for you and me are still just words. Life is short. Death is certain. And eternity is long.

With my Dad we were given just a few short months to prepare for his death, as his diagnosis was grim out of the gate. Without knowing it my Mom paraphrased the "Life is short" part of John Cardinal Newman's phrase when she said, "It went so fast," meaning their marriage, her life with my Dad. "It went so fast."

We might live long enough to see X. And we might live long enough to see Y, and we might live long enough to see Z, and you can name your own X, Y and Z. But we will be judged. That's a given. God wants to judge you. That's what I think. God wants to judge me. And that might sound a bit strange, because when we think judgment, we immediately think negative, fearful, sad. But it doesn't

have to be, as that is completely up to us and our use of free will.

Can you imagine God saying to you, “Well done. You have worked hard. You have cooperated.” One would hardly receive that negatively, fearfully, sadly.

When my Mother was ever at a Mass that I offered, that I preached, and believe me, it’s not easy to preach when your Mother is in the second pew. But after the homily, I would go back to my chair and sit down and look at her, and she would always give me a “thumb’s up,” as if to say, “Well done!” And not only did I want to get a “thumb’s up,” but I’m sure she wanted to give me a “thumb’s up,” which is why she would listen with great anticipation to what I was saying. When I preached my Mother’s funeral homily, I ended her homily by saying it was my turn to give her a thumb’s up. Thumbs up, Mom, thumbs up!

I remember one time I was preaching at the Funeral Mass of a cousin of hers. And the deceased became the head of the household at a young age because her mother was dead and her father was a drunk. And I said that in

the Funeral. And as I was preaching that, my mother gave me the “finger across the neck” and she was mouthing “They don’t know that he was a drunk . . . “ So most of the time, I got a thumbs up. Once I got a finger across her neck!

If a coach or a teacher is excited to share a trophy or a report card to a player or a student who has competed well in a game or has done well in class, how much more will Our Heavenly Father, who fashioned us out of nothing, Who has given us everything we have, wants to say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” Not, “Move along,” but “Come, enter into the joy that I have prepared for you from the foundation of the world! Wait til you see what I have for you . . . because of what you’ve done, because of how you’ve responded.”

On what will we be judged? Soccer teams are judged by how well they competed in the game. Students are judged by how well they did with the material they were taught. Next week’s Gospel is the story of the sheep and the goats; those who either were, or were not merciful to those who were in need all around them.

This week, the Lord reminds us, exhorts us, shakes us, tries to wake us up, saying, I have made an investment in you, just like the owner who gave five talents, two talents or one talent. Note they were the owner's talents. He entrusted to them his possessions, and said, "Take these. Do something with them. And they either did or they didn't.

So the Lord reminds us today's gospel that He has made an investment in us. Everything we have is from Him. Everything:

- ✓ our personalities,
- ✓ our skills,
- ✓ our talents,
- ✓ our gifts,
- ✓ our money,
- ✓ our time.

It's all His. And above all, the talent that is the gift of faith, which He has planted within us. Don't bury this gift. Don't hide it. Do something with it. Share it. I will ask you on a real day what you've done with this gift. So use it well. Share it. Let it shine. Tell others what I have done. Come

to know Me, and then help others to come to know Me. For I am the only One who ultimately matters. That, my friend, is what it means to be a good steward.

I've preached on being good stewards here at SML, to use our time, treasure, and talents well, all of which He has given us, to use them well so one day, we can hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

I can think of nothing more profitable to do this week, because we're going to hear this again next Sunday, pondering that day, that real day, that just like you and I are standing in front of each other, you and I will stand face to face with God.

I'd also like to circle back to my Mom and Dad as I pretty much had the same conversation with my Dad, as I did with my Mom just a few years later. When they used to say they could not do as much in their old age as they did when they were younger, I said to both of them, "Well, when you could, you did." And what a consolation it is for those of us who can say that. When you could, you did. You didn't put the burden on others. You helped to carry the burden, whatever the burden was.

Everybody here wants to hear Him say, “Well done.” Everybody here wants to see Our Heavenly Father’s face light up and smile, and say, “Dan, well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your Master’s joy!

But those words are not a given, any more than a trophy or Straight As on a report card are a given. So let us ponder that day with the Lord in prayer. Let us call to mind that we want to hear Him say those words. Let us ask him to show us what it is we need to do to change, where we need to wake up to make sure we hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” because life is short, death is certain, and eternity is long.