

Jesus: The Word Who is Life

A Pastoral Reflection by the Bishops of Saskatchewan

Introduction

At each moment, the Word of God sent forth from the Father speaks to every human heart. This Word is Jesus Christ whose life and suffering, death and resurrection, reveal the pattern of our own journey back to the Father. The Father invites us to listen to this Word, the Beloved (see Luke 9:35; Mark 9:7), and to follow him.

The clamour of life filled with its many demands and distractions often prevents us from hearing the voice of the Son. Illness, profound suffering and the fear of death are also moments that make it difficult to attend to the voice of Jesus.

The recent legalization in Canada of euthanasia and physician assisted suicide has introduced intense division and debate that can be unsettling and cause some to feel confused or uncertain of what voices to trust. We place our trust in the constant teaching of the Church, beginning with God alone being the author of life and death.

Beneath the din and noise of life, beneath its waves of chaos and conflict, Jesus Christ remains the Word of God spoken into the depths of each heart. By taking on human flesh, Jesus joined us in our living, suffering and dying, and beyond the door of death will ultimately share his own glorified and risen life with us. Jesus is the Word in whom we are also named the beloved of God, a daughter or son of the Father called to proclaim a word of hope in our day.

Jesus in our living

We are surrounded by messages that tell us our personal value and worth comes from outward appearances and achievements. We risk feeling inadequate and becoming discouraged if we sense we fall short of what others consider attractive, successful and healthy. This may lead some to conclude that their lives have no meaning or worth. In the Gospel of John, however, Jesus proclaims that he is our life (see John 14:6) and has come that we might have life and have it abundantly (see John 10:10). To know Jesus is to know the infinite worth of our life!

Life is God's first and foundational gift to us; indeed, the story of salvation history is the telling of God's unrelenting pursuit to share life with us. It began with the creation story in Genesis when God created humankind in God's own image and likeness and called it very good (Genesis 1:27), and reached its climax when God sent his son, as we hear in the Gospel of John, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son." (John 3:16).

Even where our life journey is difficult, the Lord is with us inviting us to give him our struggles, pains and sufferings and to receive from him in return a share in the gentle yoke of his mercy and love (see Matthew 11:30).

Jesus in our dying

From the cross, Jesus teaches us that death is not an ultimate escape or a release from unbearable pain, nor is it the last gasp of our human existence. Instead he reveals it as a moment of profound surrender to the Father and as an entry into eternal life. For this reason, the priest proclaims at the Mass of Christian Burial, "Indeed, for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended." (Preface I for the Dead, Roman Missal)

We acknowledge that pain and intolerable suffering is a part of life and will often accompany the dying process. Jesus is no stranger to the brutal physical pain and intense spiritual suffering that can accompany dying. As Christians, we believe Jesus, who pitched his tent among us (John 1:14), accompanies us at each moment of our living and dying. The writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus tasted death for everyone (see Hebrews 2:9). In Jesus we encounter God's faithfulness, love and grace that can give us hope and courage to endure to the end.

As we follow Jesus in our own dying we believe that he will ultimately lead us through the valley of suffering and death and carry us home into the bosom of the Father to share in the eternal love of their Holy Spirit.

Jesus in our rising

Jesus is our resurrection! While we look forward to the day when we will participate in the Lord's resurrection, we believe that we already meet the Risen Lord in our daily life. We encounter him within the community, in our family, friends, other pilgrims of faith and those we meet in our daily journey. Jesus invites us to recognize his presence in a special way in those who are homeless, poor, imprisoned, wounded, afflicted or infirm (see Matthew 25: 36-40).

Our loving relationships with one another affirm that our life is a journey of growing in intimacy with God and one another. These relationships blossom when at each moment we speak our 'yes' to God's will for us, both in times of joy and also in times of great struggle and eventually in the acceptance of our own dying.

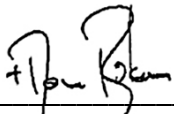
When our capacity to trust and surrender to God is tested by the many challenges we encounter in life, the belief that we will one day share in the resurrection of Jesus gives us strength to endure. All the while, our Risen Lord walks with us and goes before us; our very weakness, poverty and misery draws down God's mercy and tenderness to comfort and support us.

Conclusion

May Jesus, in whose death and resurrection we encounter the merciful face of the Father, grant us the strength of the Holy Spirit to live our lives with courage and to face the journey into our own death with eyes of faith set on the resurrection. May Mary, our Blessed Mother, through whom the Word of Life came into our world, keep us close to her Son so that with Jesus and in him, we also may be a word of hope in our world today.

February 2, 2017

Sincerely,



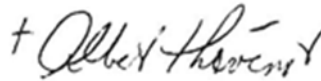
Most Rev. Donald J. Bolen
Archbishop of Regina



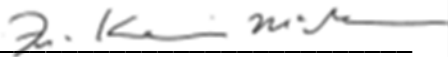
Most Rev. Murray Chatlain
Archbishop of Keewatin-Le Pas



Most Rev. Bryan Bayda
Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon



Most Rev. Albert Thévenot
Bishop of Prince Albert



Very Rev. Kevin McGee
Diocesan Administrator for Saskatoon