

Homily based on the readings from November 2, 2025 (Wisdom 3.1-9; Romans 6.3-9; John 6.37-40)

One of the most unfortunate shortcomings of modern society is the way we insulate ourselves against illness and death. While it used to be routine for family members to care for their sick and aging relatives, it has become the norm to move them to hospitals and nursing homes. To be clear: in many cases, that may be the best option for the families and individuals involved. The problem is when the young and healthy treat our healthcare system as a tool for distancing themselves from the elderly and infirm.

Another disheartening trend, particularly among the younger generations, is the avoidance of funerals. I personally know quite a few people who are completely unwilling to attend any event commemorating someone who has died, even their closest friends and relatives. Likewise, over the past several years, I have increasingly

encountered the perception that it is inappropriate to bring children to funerals – as if they need to be “protected” from the awareness of death.

The underlying problem, I would venture to say, relates more to *mortality* than to *morality*. Our broader society has gotten to the point where it concerns itself exclusively with the here and now – with the physical, material, perceptible world. If most people think about heaven at all, it is in an abstract and nebulous sense – as a distant possibility, rather than a concrete reality. Under these circumstances, it is only natural that people would view youth and vitality as the greatest possible goods, in which case old age and sickness would be the worst possible evils.

As Christians, of course, we have a completely different perspective. In the words of Saint Ambrose:

Death is ... no cause for mourning, for it is the cause of mankind's salvation. Death is not something to be avoided, for the Son of

God did not think it beneath his dignity, nor did he seek to escape it.

We all know that death is not the end, but a new beginning – one for which we have been preparing since the day of our baptism. As we heard today in Saint Paul’s letter to the Romans:

We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death,
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
we too might live in newness of life.

The question for us all today is how to affirm this principle, both in our own lives and in our witness to others.

This is not a straightforward problem with a simple solution, but there are at least two concrete strategies we should employ. First of all, we need to embrace – fully and unconditionally – the most vulnerable members of our community: the elderly, the sick, the homeless, the

disabled. To be sure, many individuals and institutions are already dedicated to this task. Think about the amazing work being done by organizations such as Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul Place – and even Sacred Heart School. There is always room, though, for all of us to do more. About two years ago, I had the incredible privilege of taking a pilgrimage to Lourdes – the shrine in France from which our sister parish in Gales Ferry takes its name. Many people associate Lourdes with miraculous healings – and that certainly is a component of what takes place there. The aspect of Lourdes, though, that struck me most powerfully is how service to the sick and disabled is *fundamental* to the mission and ministry at the shrine. People in wheelchairs are at the front and center of every public event – at every Mass, in every procession. There are legions of young volunteers from around the world whose only job is to provide comfort, care, and transportation to the pilgrims who need it. We often envision handicap accessibility as reserving a few parking places and building some ramps, but at Lourdes it simply is the way of life.

The other action we need to take – which, of course, is a particular focus of today’s liturgy – is the prayerful commemoration of our departed loved ones. As the Catechism explains, “Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping *them*, but also of making *their* intercession for *us* effective” (958).

The point, of course, is that our personal relationships do not terminate when a loved one enters a hospital or a retirement home – or even when somebody passes away. All of us – young or old, sick or healthy, living or dead – are pilgrims on the same journey, whose ultimate destination is Jesus Christ. It is our duty – it is our privilege, it is our joy – to offer our heartfelt support to one another every single *step* of the way, in every single *way* that we can.