

A Reflection, 12th Sunday A 2020

This Sunday we have resumed the readings for Ordinary Time, and from now till Advent our Gospels will be taken from Matthew. And we might note that each Sunday's second reading will be from Paul's letters. And it is to Paul that we turn to today, in particular, for his reflection on death, which will cast light on the line from today's Gospel, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul."

Paul tells us in our second reading that Adam's sin brought death into the world. "Sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death." But how can this be? Isn't death natural, a part of life? Isn't this what the well-known verse from the Old Testament book, Ecclesiastes, is saying, "To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die"?

On the other hand Paul in today's reading states that bodily death has come into the world through the sin of Adam and later in the same letter, he describe death as "the wages of sin." How can death both be natural and the consequence of sin? We have the *Catechism's* answer: "Even though man's nature is mortal, God had destined him not to die. Death was therefore contrary to the plans of God the Creator." We find this teaching in the Book of Wisdom: "God made man imperishable, He made him in the image of his own nature; It was the devil's envy that brought death into the world, as those who are his partners will discover."

The last verse of our reading from Paul balances his initial statement about sin and death, enabling us to see, in what would otherwise be unmitigated disaster, good news. “Adam prefigured the One to come, but the gift itself considerably outweighed the fall.” Thus the *Catechism* can say that “The obedience of Jesus [as he underwent suffering and death] has transformed the curse of death into a blessing.” Death now for those who cooperate with God’s offer of redemption is, in the *Catechism*’s words, “a step towards Christ and an entrance into everlasting life.” Thus with the help of our reading from St Paul we can ponder Jesus’ statement in today’s Gospel, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”

Fr David Willis OP