Homily for 33rd Sunday 2015  
November 15, 2015  
Readings: Dan. 12:1-3, Ps. 16, Heb. 10:11-18, Mk. 13:24-32  
Place: Alumni chapel, 7 pm  
Theme: The last four things  
Mood*: Instructive and encouraging.

During the last two weeks of the Church’s liturgical year, the readings focus on life’s four final things: death, judgment, heaven and hell. The prophet Daniel warns us about “unsurpassed distress,” but that the “people whose names are written in the book, shall escape.” The Psalmist provides encouragement, “I set the Lord ever before me, … I shall not be disturbed.” In Mark’s gospel, Jesus proclaims, “after the tribulation, the sun will be darkened, … stars will be falling from the sky.” … and the “son of Man will come in the clouds with great power and glory. … He will send out his angels and gather his elect.” Jesus adds, “But of that day or hour, no one knows.”

Among the final four things there is no escaping the first two, namely, death and judgment; after which we face two ultimate options: heaven or hell. Jesus will judge each of us individually; thanks be to God it is Jesus who judges and not each other. I love Pope Francis’ comment, “Who am I to judge?” As a priest, I have learned “no one knows what goes on behind closed doors,” and if I might add, “no one knows what goes on in anyone’s heart.” God is our judge and not each other, thanks be to God.

Each person is created in the image and likeness of God. Each person is inherently good. Each of us possesses, however, an inclination to do evil. And we actualize that possibility. The Psalmist writes, “Even the just man sins seven times a day.” When we sin, i.e., when we do bad, we feel bad. Yet we continue to do sinful actions because we think these actions will make us feel better. Under that short-sighted notion, many people party long into the night, and wake up the next day with a headache, and wondering what did I do and why did I do it? Drinking is one example, but sooner or later, almost everybody is tempted by the seven capital sins: anger, … lust, … pride, … greed, … gluttony, … envy … and sloth. In light of these temptations and sins, and Jesus’ wish that we would be happy and holy, may I make three suggestions.

1. While the Church requires Catholics to receive the sacrament of reconciliation at least once a year, may I suggest four times a year, namely, Advent, Lent, before and after summer. We are all creatures of habit, we develop routines. It is easy to develop the habit of not going to confession; try to develop the habit of going to confession four times a year, or sooner after commission of a mortal sin.
2. Make sure that you attend Mass each Sunday. So many people say, “I am too busy.” If you are too busy for God, you are too busy. Students on sports teams, both Division I and club teams, when you travel on weekends, your coaches have the responsibility within all reasonable limits to provide transportation for you to Sunday Mass. That anyone will commit various kinds of sins is understandable because of human weakness.
That anyone would miss Sunday Mass is not so understandable. If you are traveling through North Dakota, it might be difficult to find a Catholic Church. If you are traveling through the eastern United States, there will be a Catholic Church within easy driving distance.

3. Pray every day. When you wake up, thank God for your five senses; not everybody has them. When you eat your meals, say grace before meals; not everybody has three meals a day. When you anticipate a difficult test, or assignment or an encounter with someone, pray to God to help you. My favorite prayer when facing difficulties comes from St. Teresa of Avila, “let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you, all things are passing, God alone remains constant.”

The final words of today’s gospel proclaim, “You know not the day or the hour” when death will come. That phrase appears so poignant in the aftermath of this weekend’s bombings at Paris. A few thoughts, please. 1. We are at war, not against Islam, but against terrorism in general and ISIS in particular. The perception and motivation underlying much of ISIS’s terrorism is a violent “reading,” rather than the overwhelmingly popular peaceful “reading,” of Islam. We are not at war with people who live in Muslim-majority countries, or who speak Arabic, or who are immigrants fleeing persecution, which includes millions of Muslims themselves. 2. We need to take appropriate and effective action, not just any action; read St. Thomas Aquinas’ classical conditions for conducting a just war. 3. From an historical perspective, wars are sadly inevitable. Distinguish wars of aggression and wars of defense. Defensive wars will remain necessary as long as evil remains on earth, i.e., until the end of time. 4. Lastly, pray for peace in the world and in your mind, heart and soul. The Blessed Mother Mary and all the popes as long as I have lived have asked the world repeatedly to pray for peace. Pray for not just international peace but also interior peace. Ponder Jesus’ words which we pray at every Mass, “Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.” (Jn.14:27) When you leave church this evening, I hope you leave peace-filled.

During these last two weeks of the Church’s liturgical year as we focus on the last four things. Let’s use this time to renew our relationship with God who created us to be holy and happy in this world and for all eternity.