

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

A year ago this past August I went to Australia to give some talks for several dioceses, including Wollongong, near Sydney. A retired gentleman, John Meehan, picked me up at the airport. As soon as I got in the car, he turned to me, and said, "You are from Kansas City." I said, "Yes." He said, "That means you are a fan of the Kansas City Royals." It is rare to find anyone in Australia who follows American baseball enough to know the names of the teams. Well, John has been a baseball fan all his life, played the game in his youth, and now helps promote the Pirates in the Illawarra Baseball League. He told me one of his dreams has been to see a major league baseball game in the United States, but he's too old now to make the trip. So, for the past two Octobers, I've exchanged many emails with John Meehan, who has been watching the playoffs on TV - not in person - and cheering for the Royals half a world away from us.

I told him I was unable to go to the second League Championship Series playoff game because it took place on a Saturday afternoon, and I wanted to be at St. Anthony's for confessions and mass that day. He told me this story: He normally spent Saturday nights at a local club enjoying the company of friends. But one year on the Saturday before Christmas, he went to church instead so that he could go to confession. While he was at church, the club held a special membership raffle for \$1000. They pulled out John's name. You had to be present to win. Someone else got the money. I told him a good confession is worth \$1000.

Like my friend, many people who support the Royals were unable to go to the park in October. But 800,000 gathered in the streets last week to celebrate their achievement. When something like this happens, television isn't enough. You have to be present to win. People feel the need to be with other people.

Today we sustain many friendships by email, on the phone, on camera, in social media, or by text. None of it will ever replace the simple beauty of talking to another human being in person. We are here today in this church because we believe that being together is better than being apart. There is something beautiful and holy in being physically present with other human beings.

God created our bodies. Our bodies experience the presence of God in baptism, confession, holy communion, marriage and the other sacraments. At the end of someone's life, we treat the body with dignity. We also believe in the resurrection of the body, and that is a theme of today's first reading. After a great persecution, Daniel prophesies that God will bring justice. Those who were martyred could not enjoy victory on earth. But God would provide victory for them in a more spectacular way. Daniel says, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever." This is the first passage in the bible to use the term "eternal life." A few centuries after Daniel, Jesus would clarify his meaning.

God will never give up on creation. God will continue to find ways to bring us to new life. One way we can enrich our appreciation of the resurrection of the body is to be in the presence of people we love. It is not always possible, but when we make the effort to be with someone in person, not just electronically, we will experience the beauty and mystery of humanity, the crown of God's creation.

Sunday, November 15, 2015