

Homily  
32OrdB  
November 11, 2018  
St. Bernard Church  
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## What Do We Take To Heaven?

If we are invited to someone's house for dinner, we always feel obliged to bring something. So what are we going to take?

Flowers?  
A bottle of wine?  
An appetizer?  
Dessert?

If we die, and are invited to come to heaven, what would we take with us? Would it be okay to show up empty-handed?

When we're young, we are typically very focused on what we can accomplish by our own efforts. There's pressure to do well in school, to excel in extracurricular activities and eventually to get a good job and have a successful career.

It's common in our country to measure our success by what we can buy: a bigger house, a nicer car, a place on the lake, and so on.

We take pride in how our ability and our achievements make it possible to become more and more successful.

As we get older, though, and especially if we grow in our faith, we start seeing how the blessings that we have received in our lives resulted not so much from our own efforts but more from the sacrifices and efforts of others and, ultimately, from God's generosity and grace.

For example, we might have the benefit of a good education, but who made that education possible? Our parents. Our teachers. And those who made donations, voluntarily or otherwise, to help build and operate the schools we attended.

And even though we might have developed the intelligence that we were born with, our brain itself is a pure gift.

Have you ever thought about all the things that had to happen in the past, things that you had no control over, just for you to even exist?

That's something I have become very aware of.

My great-grandfather, Jeremiah Sullivan, and his wife, Norah, had 11 children. Five of the children died before they were 14. The 11<sup>th</sup> child was named Robert, born in 1872.

If Jeremiah and Norah had not had 11 children, if Robert had not been born, and if he hadn't lived long enough to get married and have children, I wouldn't be here. He was my grandfather.

That's just one part of one person's history. It's humbling for me and anyone else who thinks about it to reflect on all of the events from the beginning of time that had to take place for us just to be alive.

Listen to this, from Psalm 139. These words apply to every one of us here in this church tonight/this morning:

“Lord, you formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb...  
My very self you knew;...  
When I was being made in secret,  
Fashioned as in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes foresaw my actions; in your book all are written down;  
My days were shaped before one came to be.”

Not a single one of us can take a single breath without God's permission and His grace. We cannot take credit for any of the gifts we have received in life. We are merely stewards of what God has entrusted to us.

The two women described in our readings this evening/morning have 2 things in common. The widow who hosted Elijah and the widow who put two small coins in the collection basket were both very poor when it came to money but extremely rich when it came to spiritual wisdom.

Both of them claimed nothing for themselves and entrusted everything they had, their last bit of food and their last bit of money, to God. They both knew what it meant to be a child of God, to be completely dependent on His love, His will and His grace, claiming nothing as their own.

These two women remind me of another woman. St. Therese of Lisieux. She died at age 24. During her short life, she was invisible to the world, living her last 9 years in a cloistered monastery. After her death, her writings were discovered. She

eventually was declared a doctor of the Catholic Church. She is and will always be one of the most inspiring and influential people who has ever lived.

Here's a quote from one of her writings, containing her reflections on what she intended to take to heaven:

"I thank You, O my God! for all the graces that you have granted me,  
Especially the grace of making me pass through the crucible of suffering.  
...After earth's Exile, I hope to go and enjoy you in your Kingdom,  
But I do not want to lay up merits for heaven.  
I want to work for your Love Alone with the one purpose of pleasing you:  
To console your Sacred Heart, and to save souls who will love you forever.

**In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands,**  
not asking you to count my works."

This is the secret to a life that is truly rich, truly fulfilling: to love God, to trust Him completely. To give Him total control over everything we do. To give Him all the credit for every good that takes place in our lives. To seek nothing other than to do His will.

Every time we find ourselves wanting a trophy or recognition for something we've done, we need to stop and realize we're on the wrong path. The goal is for each one of us to live with the conviction of the two women in tonight's readings and St. Therese, loving God, trusting Him in all things, and wanting only to get to heaven some day with empty hands.