Homily for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time(11/10/2019)

Rev. Francis Kim

A priest was visiting a very old parishioner in her home. After giving her communion, he asked her if she ever thinks about the ‘hereafter.’ She answered, “Oh, yes, Father, I often think about the hereafter; in fact, every time I walk into another room, I ask myself, ‘Now, what did I come here after?’”

In today’s Gospel, the Sadducees did not believe in any hereafter. There was no heaven or hell. There was no resurrection, no life after death.

And, if, in fact, there was a heaven, they asked Jesus a crafty riddle to show that it would be an absurd concept anyway, but in bringing up that silly case about woman with the seven husbands, they were unknowingly asking some of the questions we might have about heaven.

For example, we wonder whether babies who die as babies will still be babies in heaven, whether those who die at a very old age will be old in heaven also, and if not, what age will they be?

And, for that matter, what age will we be or anyone else be? In the 4th century, St. Augustine suggested that everyone in heaven would be 33, because that was Jesus’ age when He died and rose from death.

We also wonder whether we will recognize one another and whether we will even want to recognize one another or whether we want to be recognized by everyone. After all, there are people we didn’t especially like here on earth, and we certainly don’t want to pal around with them in heaven for all eternity.

Will our pets be in heaven? Is there ice cream in heaven? Will be surprised at who is there or who is not there? Will our scars and wrinkles be gone? What will we do all day? Will we ever get bored? Will heaven be air conditioned? In short, what will heaven really be like?

Listen to what Jesus tells the Sadducees when they ask Him what will happen to the woman with the seven husbands when they all die? He says that in heaven, the woman is not going to be anybody’s wife.

So, their question is not relevant. Why? Because in the resurrection, all life will be radically changed and different. People will be different, heaven will be different. All will be totally beyond our wildest imaginations.

Just as a few hundred years ago, our ancestors could not even imagine an artificial heart or the wonders of a computer or travel to outer space or lading on the moon, so we cannot imagine what heaven will be like.

Jesus is saying, forget all your categories, all your paradigms, all your preconceived ideas. Heaven is beyond time and space, beyond all our human experiences. Heaven, eternal life with God, is so wonderful, so full and rich, that no questions are adequate, and no answers would be fully understood.

We are given no details about heaven, no final answers. We have no picture-postcards from heaven. Instead, we are told to hold all our questions and to just have faith and trust that God will handle things better than we could ever hope for or imagine.

In short, we are to remember that when we die, and when those we love die, that God’s love does not die, that is God’s love will continue to grow for us and that for all eternity, we will possess God, who is the source of all perfect truth and beauty and goodness.

That is the definition of true happiness. That is all we need to know about heaven, and that is enough for us.

When we think about the hereafter, I think we have to go back to St. Paul’s description of heaven in 1st Corinthians Chapter 2 and verse 9, “No eye has seen nor ear heard, nor has it ever entered into our hearts what God has prepared for those who love God.”

Paul is telling us, “Be prepared when you die to be totally surprised at the answers you will get, answers you never even had the question for.” How barren our lives would be if we don’t have this hope.

Time is flying, and life is very short. If there is no life after death, no heaven, no promise of a better world, then life in this world is empty, hopeless, without meaning or purpose.

Each of us has a place waiting for us in heaven with our name on it and, if we are faithful to Jesus Christ, it will be ours not just for a few years but forever.