

Even in the face of death, do not be afraid

“Peace be with you!” This was the first thing Jesus said when he appeared on the day of the resurrection. He also said: “Do not be afraid.”

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Why would anyone be afraid? One woman I knew reminded me of Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, in the Gospel. This woman prayed night and day. And yet, when the day of

her death approached, she was afraid. I had to tell her: “Don’t be afraid!”

This is the mission of a priest—the *presbyter* or *elder*. St James wrote: “If one of you is ill, he should send for the elders of the church, and they must anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord and pray over him.”

Several times I have sat beside someone in their final days. Where does the grace come from to give them strength and courage? Who can say except to say that it comes from God? I only know that, when the moment comes, it’s there. The one who is dying finds it. The angels are coming. As they did for Lazarus in the parable, they will take this Christian to a world that the rest of us will only enter later, when our turn comes to die.

In such moments, I recall the words Jesus spoke at the Last Supper. Peter

and the other apostles were telling him, “We will go with you wherever you go.” Our Lord answered: “My little children, I shall not be with you much longer. You will look for me, and, as I told the Jews, where I am going, you cannot come.”

He was speaking of a world beyond anything we can imagine on our own. It is a world where Jesus is waiting for us. That is why he insists: “Do not be afraid.”

Again, it was the Last Supper when Jesus spoke of this mystery: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house ... I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too.”

Scripture says that fear is the beginning of wisdom. We should be

afraid of committing sin. If we have sinned and have refused to repent, then we have lots to fear. As Jesus said: “Fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.”

We should be afraid of offending God. But we should never be afraid of God. We should look forward to death, so that we can go to be with Christ. We want to be like St Paul who said, “I am racing for the finish! All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.”

This article by Fr. Joe Babendreier first appeared in the Sunday Nation on 15th May 2011
