

**HOMILY FOR THE DIOCESAN ADULT ENRICHMENT CONFERENCE MASS  
ST. PATRICK CHURCH, DECATUR, ILLINOIS**

**Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois  
November 7, 2010**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Marie Wilson put on her coat and joined her father in the walk to the war memorial in Northern Ireland. She was twenty years old and a trainee nurse. "Do you want your umbrella?" her mother asked as she was going. "Don't fuss, Mom," said Marie, and she was gone. At 10:43 on that November morning, in 1987, a terrorist bomb exploded at the war memorial in Northern Ireland, killing thirteen people. Among those killed was Marie Wilson.

As she lay wounded and dying in the rubble, Marie grabbed hold of her father's hand and squeezed it as tightly as she could. "I love you very much, Daddy," she said to him, and those were the last words he ever heard her say. Gordon Wilson, Marie's father, survived that explosion. He later became a member of the Irish Senate in Dublin, and an active campaigner for peace. He met with men of violence on both sides, and sought to persuade them to see life in a different way.

Marie's mother, Joan Wilson, an organist in her local church, became a counselor for bereaved people. After losing her precious daughter, Marie, Joan lost a son in a car crash, and shortly afterwards her beloved husband, Gordon, died. After her own dark times, Joan started to visit other people who were suffering loss. Finally she wrote a book for those who are bereaved, entitled *All Shall Be Well*. Joan often cites the words spoken by Gordon, after the loss of Marie: "God is good, and we shall meet again."

Gordon Wilson's words come in a direct line from the teaching of Jesus himself. In conversation with the Sadducees, who believe in God, but not in a life after death, Jesus points out that God is God of the living. It makes no sense to be God of the dead. Jesus also points out to his hearers that life beyond the grave is different from life in this world. We will be children of the resurrection.

This understanding of life and death, and what lies beyond, was demonstrated in the time of the Maccabees, in the story of the seven sons put to death for their religion. Each son expresses a belief in the justice of God, the reward of a good life and the punishment of sinners. All the injustices of this world will be addressed and redressed. Where people

have been robbed of life in this world, and deprived of its hopes and joys, there will be a restoration and a fulfillment of life for them in heaven.

In preaching this message on his missionary journeys, St. Paul reflects on the blessings that we have received with the Gospel. We have an inexhaustible comfort and a sure hope in all the pathways of our life. Paul himself would stand in great need of this comfort and this hope, as he met with much opposition and outright hostility in his travels. He speaks about “bigoted and evil people”, whom he has come across, and at whose hands he has personally suffered. But Paul will go on, and persevere in his work, despite the hardships. He knows the love of God, and he knows the courage of Christ Jesus.

Gordon Wilson knew the love of God. He also knew the courage of Christ. After the bomb explosion and the death of his daughter, he said, “I bear no ill will towards those who did this.” This quiet and gentle man shook the world with his fortitude and his faith. He did not allow this terrible violence to destroy his firm belief in God and God’s goodness.

Joan Wilson knows what it is to suffer the loss of loved ones. She has been through the darkness. Time does not heal, she says. It just helps you to cope better. Her faith is constant and her hope is bright. She reminds

herself every day of Gordon's words: "God is good, and we shall meet again." She looks forward to the time when she will be reunited with her husband, her son and her daughter.

Marie Wilson, that young trainee nurse, has left us the great testimony of her dying words, spoken from beneath the rubble: "I love you very much, Daddy." Faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

As we celebrate this Mass for the Diocesan Adult Enrichment Conference here in Decatur at St. Patrick Church, it is good for us to reflect on these truths of our faith reflected in today's readings from Sacred Scripture, in particular our belief in the resurrection.

In the creed that we profess at Mass every Sunday, we profess that "we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." The reference here to the "resurrection of the dead" is not about the resurrection of Jesus after His death on the cross; it refers to **our own resurrection**. In fact, the Apostles Creed is even more explicit in professing our Catholic belief in the "resurrection of the body." We do not believe that we will live like **spirits** for all eternity. We believe that our **bodies** will be raised up on the last day, when Christ comes again. But they will not be

like the bodies we have now, thank God. Our resurrected bodies will be **glorified** bodies. Jesus tells us that life in heaven will be infinitely different from anything we've experienced here on earth. We don't know exactly what it will be like, but we do know that eternal life in heaven with our resurrected, glorified bodies will mean no more tears, no more sickness, arthritis, cancer, disease, disability, or disappointment; no sin, no boredom, no broken relationships, no taxes, no layoffs, no unemployment, no inflation, no elections and no paid political announcements

Our Catholic tradition places special emphasis on praying for those who have died during the month of November. We began this month celebrating All Saints Day on November 1<sup>st</sup> and All Souls Day on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. The month culminates liturgically on the Solemnity of Christ the King, which we will observe on November 21<sup>st</sup> this year. In a sense these days are all related to each other in expressing our hope for all the dead to be resurrected and live forever in God's kingdom, and so we pray for all the faithful departed throughout this month.

In thinking about death and preparing ourselves for that inevitable reality, it is good to avoid two extremes. One extreme is to think that it is impossible to get into heaven. We call this despair. It is the sin of Judas,

thinking that our sins are so great that God will not or cannot forgive us. It is the Devil's main trick to make people believe that they are unworthy of God's forgiveness. The other extreme is to think that everyone will go to heaven no matter what they believe or how they have lived here on earth. We call this presumption. It is wrong to presume that everyone will go to heaven or even that a particular person is now in heaven because we are somehow convinced of his or her goodness. Only God knows what is in a person's mind and heart and conscience. God's offer of salvation is indeed made to everyone through Christ's suffering, death and resurrection, but God also respects our freedom to accept or reject this invitation. Not everyone accepts it; some may certainly reject it.

May our daily lives be an expression of the Gospel: faith in the goodness of God; the bright hope of heaven; and a tender love, one for another. In this Eucharist, we are given a foretaste of that heavenly banquet and the nourishment we need to strengthen us for the journey.

May God give us this grace. Amen.