

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year B: Dt 6:2-6; Ps 18; Heb 7:23-28; Mk 12:28b-34
October 31, 2021
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In the opening prayer for this Mass, we asked God to grant that we might “hasten without stumbling” to receive the things He has promised. What God has promised to those who are faithful is nothing less than eternal life. And because we often experience trials and difficulties in this life, many of us hasten to arrive at God’s gift of Paradise. Some people, though, might not be in too much of a rush to get to Heaven. Although there are trials in this life, there are also many blessings, and there are also many pleasures which provide comfort and enjoyment. And so, some people might not be too anxious to finish this life and get to Heaven. As some say, we’re not supposed to “wish our life away.”

But still, we ask God to grant that we may hasten to Heaven. By this we mean that we need His help so that we stay on track for Heaven and keep making progress by getting closer and closer to eternal life. The way we do that is by keeping the Commandments of God and growing in holiness. As we heard Moses say in the first reading, “*Fear the Lord, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you.*” And then in the Gospel, we heard Jesus confirm the most important commandment, which we also heard in the first reading: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*” Putting God first in our lives, and letting Him show us how to love others is how we stay on track for eternal life and hasten to Heaven.

One potential problem with hastening, however, is that, when we rush through things, we can sometimes slip up and make mistakes. That’s why the prayer for this Mass asks God to help us “hasten *without stumbling.*” The fact is, there are many things that can make us stumble on our way to Heaven. For the most part, these stumbling blocks are called sins, or temptations, which tend to pull us off the road to Heaven. But there can be other stumbling blocks, too, like scandals in the Church that make it more difficult to persevere in the faith, or sufferings and crosses in life which make it harder to get through this life and to preserve our faith in the goodness of God.

So, each of us should think carefully about the most likely or common things that cause us to stumble on our way through this life. What are the things that cause us at times to take our eyes off of the goal of Heaven? What are the things

that make it difficult to keep our faith in the promises of God? What are the things that most often make us stumble?

One common way of stumbling on the way to Heaven is by trying to love God without loving others. Some people find it much easier to love God, who is perfect, than to love others, with all their faults and imperfections. We might think that if we show enough love for God, He will give us a pass on loving others. But Christ taught us that we prove our love for God by loving others (cf. Mt 25:40). When we love others with all their faults and imperfections, we imitate God's love for us – for, none of us is without fault or imperfection. That's why Jesus was careful to point out that loving our neighbor is the second greatest commandment, after loving God. As we hasten to Heaven, we need to make sure we don't stumble by refusing to love others as we hope God will love us. In fact, learning to love others, with all their faults and imperfections, is an important way to hasten to Heaven.

Today, of course, is also Halloween, the eve of all the halos, the night before All Saints Day. We know that Halloween no longer has any religious significance for those who celebrate it, but it's good for us to know the Christian roots of this popular holiday in our secular culture. All Saints Day, November 1, is such an important feast day in the Church that the vigil, night before, was considered a very holy time – a time of eager anticipation of the great feast in honor of all the saints, just as Christmas Eve is marked with solemnity before the great feast of Christmas.

So, on this eve of the halos, it's important for us to remember that the saints are not people who never stumbled on the way to Heaven. No, they are the people who admitted and acknowledged their sins and stumbles with honesty and humility and then relied on God's mercy to get up after they stumbled and keep moving toward Heaven. Perseverance is one of the marks of the saints, who kept moving toward eternal life with God, regardless of the obstacles and the setbacks along the way. They teach us how to hasten toward Heaven, by keeping our eyes and our hearts set on the one thing that matters the most – on remaining faithful to Christ and living as He taught, so that we can accept and receive His gift of eternal life. Through the intercession of all the saints in Heaven, may we all hasten without stumbling to receive the great things that God has promised to those who are faithful.