

**"Living, Loving and Dying"**  
Homily of November 16, 2003  
by Father Gerry Murphy

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***But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.***

Foreboding words indeed, which refer to the end times, as depicted in Mark's gospel today. The story goes, that one bright sunny morning, St. Francis was out watering his garden - there were no lawn sprinklers in those days! - when a passer-by approached him and put the following question to him: "*Francis, if I were to tell you that the world will end at 6pm this evening, what would you do?*" Francis paused momentarily and then replied: "*I would simply go on watering my garden.*"

This is the reply, you might say, of a very virtuous and saintly man; a man whose has all his affairs in order and is living in right relationship with his God and neighbor. In the words of Pope John the 23rd when he was close to death, St. Francis was in effect saying: "My bags are packed and I am ready to leave."

If we were posed the same question as St. Francis, would any of us be as self-assured and ready? Can any of us say that all our affairs are in order? Are there perhaps unspoken words which we still need to say; words like: I love you, I forgive you, I need you. John Powell, a Jesuit author and teacher, once wrote a moving little book entitled, *Unconditional Love, the Story of Tommy*, a former student of his who died of cancer at age twenty-four. Shortly before he died, Tommy came to Powell and thanked him for a precious insight he had once gleaned from one of his classes. Powell had told the class: There are only two potential tragedies in life and dying young isn't one of them. It's tragic to die and not have loved and it's just as tragic to die and not have expressed your love to those around you.

And what of the things I might still need to do, in order to live a happier and more meaningful life? Perhaps I need to change my job? Perhaps I need to look for work. How about using my talents and gifts in the service of my parish or local community. Do I need help to break an unhealthy habit or addiction? Perhaps I need to end a relationship. Do I need to pray more, and so deepen my relationship with the God who gave me life and lovingly sustains me? When can I say that, I too, would go on watering my garden?

In our first reading today from the prophet Daniel, the end of the world is depicted in very bleak and graphic terms. However, it also speaks of a time of resurrection, when those who are asleep will awaken, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace. So, we can

draw from this, that some kind of separation of the worthy from the unworthy is envisaged. Of course, all of this, is simply engaging speculation on the part of the prophet Daniel, but it does pose the challenging question: How do we make the grade?

Well, it is not my belief that human life is about making any grade. I simply believe that our purpose here on earth is twofold: we are here to learn and to grow. To learn how to live truly human lives in imitation of Jesus Christ, and to grow in holiness. And how do we grow in holiness, you might well ask.

When we sacrifice sleep to tend to the needs of our distressed child, or when we patiently spend time with a parent stricken with Alzheimer's disease, we grow in holiness. When we find it in our heart to forgive someone who has betrayed and hurt us, we grow in holiness. When we use our gifts and talents to serve, and give joy to others, we grow in holiness. When we put aside quality time for personal and family prayer, and actively participate in the life and worship of our Church, we grow in holiness. When we discover our intimate communion with all people and all creation, we grow in holiness. When we embrace all the ordinary, everyday tasks of our lives, with a loving and cheerful heart, then they become our means to happiness and holiness, and ultimately, when the end times come, to our safety and salvation with God.

Allow me to conclude by sharing with you a few short lines from Henry David Thoreau. I often use these words when I'm standing by a graveside presiding at a rite of committal: *"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."*