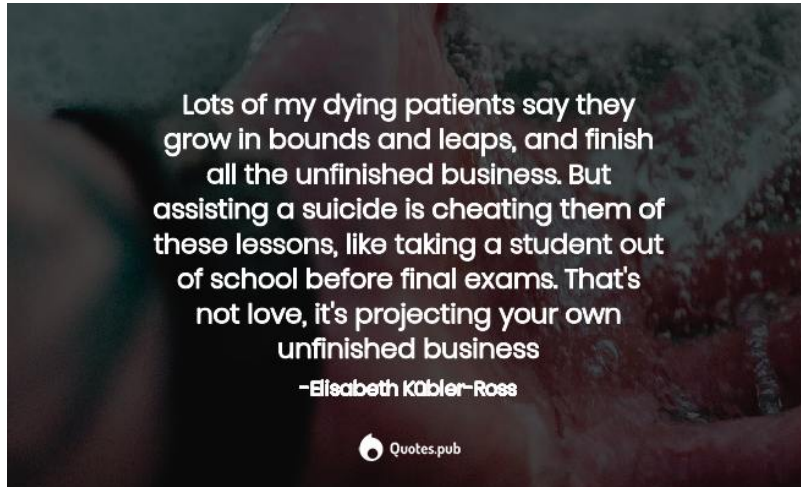


Homily for Sept. 6, 2020 – 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Back in 1983 while taking an introductory psychology course in college, the professor told us students, on the first day of class that our term paper, due at the end of the semester, could be on any topic we wanted. He did, however, offer a list of suggestions, and I chose the topic of death and dying. By pure chance, three weeks later, the world's authority on the topic of death and dying, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, was coming to town to give a talk. What an opportunity! I went to the lecture with the idea of bolstering my term paper, but I soon realized I was in the presence of a truly remarkable and compassionate person. The term paper is long gone, but the pearls of wisdom she dropped on my lap 37 years ago will stay with me forever.



Elizabeth Kubler-Ross was the Swiss-born American psychologist who gave us the five stages of grieving (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) that we all seem to go through and not just when we are grieving the death of a loved one. Among the many things she spoke

about that night was her conviction that we should all try our best to live and die without any unfinished business. Dying without unfinished business might mean saying "thank-you," "I love you," or "I forgive you" to someone you care for who is dying or perhaps you need to say those things because you are the one dying. She cautioned us to do this now and not to wait until death was knocking at our door. So, for example she said, "You are now 40 years old and you remember back to a time when you were 9 years old and struggling with math. Your teacher at the time stayed after school hours for a whole week helping you so you would not fall behind the other students. Because you remembered this teacher's commitment and kindness, you need to track her down, and say "thank-you" even though it is 31 years later. Even though no one was actually dying, that is an example of living and dying without unfinished business," she said.

During the question and answer period, at the end of her presentation, Elizabeth took a question from a man who was divorced and who recently heard that his ex-wife was dying of cancer. He had long since accepted the divorce, accepted his responsibility in the break up, and never once wished his ex-wife any ill. He wanted to bring his dying ex-wife a bouquet of her favorite flower along with a card expressing his concern and prayers for her during this difficult time. This man's question to Elizabeth was this: "Bringing his ex-wife flowers, is this a good idea or a bad idea?" When Elizabeth asked him why this could possibly be a bad idea, the man explained that his ex-wife was bitter against him and would probably throw the flower in his face. That's why he thought it was probably a bad idea. Elizabeth's answer was brilliant. She said to him, "Do it anyway. Do not miss this opportunity. If the worst-case scenario plays out, and she throws the flowers in your face, you will die without any unfinished business, but, she unfortunately, will."

Let's go back to the Prophet Ezekiel in today's first reading. Ezekiel lived through a terrible period in Jewish history. He, along with thousand of his fellow countrymen and women, were deported from their county of Judah by the invading Babylonians. Their sacred Temple, along with their sacred city Jerusalem, were destroyed, and everything they valued was suddenly gone. Ezekiel is commanded by God to warn the people that things will only get worse if they do not turn to God and put God at the center of their lives once again. God tells Ezekiel that if the people do not listen to him, he will not die with unfinished business but they will...**they will die in their iniquity** (sin)." Ezekiel's duty is not to badger the people for their faults nor is it to question whether speaking God's word to them is a good idea or a bad idea. Ezekiel's duty is to invite people into the rich life God always wanted and still wants for them. If Ezekiel does not do this, then he, as a prophet, will die with unfinished business. He must do what God asks him to do and leave the results to God.

In the gospel, there is a question of what you do with someone who sins against you. The short answer is: do everything you can to be reconciled with that brother or sister who has hurt you. First, go to them privately, without making a big fuss, and settle it then and there. If that does not work, bring in a couple of witnesses who are neutral and not just allies who will prove you were right and the other person wrong. If that does not work, bring it before the Church, the body of believers, whose role is supposed to be about love and forgiveness. In other

words, do anything and everything you can to be agents of forgiveness and reconciliation. If you do not, you better be prepared to live and die with unfinished business. You will die asking yourself, “Did I do enough to forgive those who hurt me?” Or, “Will I spend my living and my dying convincing myself, and anyone who will listen, why I was so right and why they were so wrong?” What if the reconciliation still does not work? What if the flowers are thrown back in your face? Well, you will have done all you could, and you will die without unfinished business, but the one who refused your overtures to reconciliation will go to their grave with all kinds of unfinished business.

Pope Francis has been very good at encouraging us to renew our relationship with God and with God’s creation. Caring for the environment and being good stewards of our earthly home, Pope Francis reminds us, is not a side option to Christian faith; it is central. When we put profit before people, we are abdicating our role as stewards and not loving our neighbour as ourselves as the gospels command us. If we keep up our materialistic mindset and put our wants before the needs of other on this planet, we will be living with our own unfinished business, not to mention jeopardizing the future of those to come.

As we try to care for each other and this wonderful earth that God has provided us with, let us do it in such a way that we can look back and say, “we did the best that we could with no regrets and no unfinished business.”

Fr. Phil