

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH
SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2023**

JOHN 17: 1-13

“LIFE FOREVER”

The great 19th century writer Mark Twain wrote a story about an undertaker named Mr. Jacop. Mr. Jacop had an unusual method of drumming up business for his funeral home. If he got word of an impending death, he would load up a coffin in his wagon, hitch up the horse, and go over to the home of the dying person. He would announce that he was present and ready to serve them when the death occurred---and at a fair price. Sometimes the death had already occurred or was just about to happen and all was easy for Mr. Jacop. But sometimes the death came slowly. So he would just wait with his coffin in the wagon by the house so as to be sure as to not lose the business. One time he had to wait 3 days! But no problem---he would just crawl into the coffin and sleep there at night. It was said that his business did very well! (Mark Twain, “Jim Blaine & His Grandfather’s Ram”, in Great Short Works of Mark Twain, Perennial Classics, 1962, p. 103)

Mr. Jacop’s business method was based on an important truth---death is inevitable. Each of us will face it some day. But death is not the end of the story.

In our gospel reading for today, the Sunday in between Ascension Day and Pentecost, Christ promises eternal life to those who know Him. As we read in John 17:3----(these are Jesus’ words in a prayer to the Father) “This is eternal life---that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” Knowing the Father and knowing the Son---our Lord says that is eternal life.

There are three parts to eternal life:

1. Already being in it now due to living for Christ in the here and now.
2. Our life with the Lord in the time between our deaths and His Second Coming.
3. The infinite time (never ending!) after Christ comes back and we are resurrected. That part of eternal life is even better than the two earlier parts---and it never ends!

What is life after death like? There is lots we don't know. The Bible doesn't give too much detail. It's mostly a matter of "wait and see"! But we do know some things---I'll say a little about them.

NUMBER ONE--- There will be a happy reunion with your departed loved ones, with your family and friends. Death separates. Heaven unites! Be sure to not miss out on that happy reunion!

Sometimes people say---"Well, hell won't be so bad. That's where most of my friends are going!" Maybe you're right about your friends, but don't count on a happy reunion with them. Because in hell you will be all alone. So don't choose hell!

NUMBER TWO---In the life to come, there will be no sadness, no tears, no pain, no death. All of those will be gone. Are you sick here? You won't be sick there. Tears here? No tears there! St John described this for us in Revelation 21:4---"Neither shall there be sadness, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the old things have passed away." What a wonderful future!

NUMBER THREE---The life to come won't be boring. We won't be static and stay the same forever. We won't be stuck in a rut, sitting on a cloud with a harp. We will be able to grow, to receive more and more of God's light and joy. We will be able to continuously grow closer to God. St. Gregory Palamas wrote---"The saints will progress infinitely in the vision of God in the ages to come." (in The Mind of the Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Hierotheos, p. 34) Eternal life means no boredom!

NUMBER FOUR-- Eternal life means to be with Jesus Christ forever. Number four on my list, but really #1---the most important thing about heaven!

What is the very best thing about heaven? Jesus. So live here focused on Him so that you can be with Him forever.

Michael Faraday was one of the greatest British scientists in the 1800s---a genius in both chemistry and physics. (Not much like me---I barely squeaked through chemistry in high school and physics in college....) And he was a firm believer in Christ---he knew the Bible well, lived a holy life, and told others about the Lord. Once a friend asked Faraday to tell him some details about life after death. Faraday replied, "I can't know much and can't tell you much. But---I know I will see Jesus Christ, and that is all I need to know! That will be enough!" (in "Our Daily Bread", 4/10/92)

Faraday was correct. To be with Christ forever is all we need to know about eternal life. Remember verse 3 in today's gospel reading----"**This** is eternal life---to know Thee and Jesus Christ when Thou hast sent."

Knowing Christ brings us eternal life. And the best thing about eternal life is knowing Jesus Christ.

So the question for each of us is-----do I now have eternal life? Am I really living *now* for the Lord? Just being a church member or having some vague religious beliefs, but not living with Him at the center of our lives—that won't cut it.

So to put the question a different way----“Do I really know Jesus Christ?” Not sure? Then you need to fix the problem.

If you have never been actually united with Christ in Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation, you should get started on working towards that---become one of our catechumens and come to Christ in the fullest way.

If you *have* in the past been baptized and chrismated, but have slipped away from truly living for God---it's time to draw back more closely to Him. A great way to start that process is the sacrament of Confession. And a cup of coffee for some deep talk with whoever you know that you think knows Christ better than you! Decide what needs changing in your life. Repent of your sins and with God's help, change what needs changing.

To really live in Christ in this life---that takes a high level of commitment. But it's worth it, because you want to live with Him forever.

Live totally for the Lord now.....and then, by God's mercy and grace you will live a joyous eternal life with Him forever.