

HOMILY

The Thirty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time

St. John the Evangelist Parish
ANNUAL BEREAVEMENT MASS
November 11, 2007
10:00 AM Liturgy

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski

Arthur Schiff died last year at the age of 66. You may not recognize his name, but I guarantee you've heard his voice. He sold everything you could think of. He accomplished this in two thousand late night commercials. I know you've heard some of his commercials. "Buy now!" he would always say. He would describe his product's amazing virtues; then he would use a phrase he coined himself:

"BUT WAIT—THERE'S MORE"

Then he would give you a bonus product to sweeten the deal. And everything sold for \$19.95. I can't but help wonder if, as Arthur Schiff breathed his dying breath, he didn't hear a voice saying to him, "*But wait, Arthur! There's more!*"

Today we hear a conversation between Jesus and a group of Jews who were called Sadducees. The Sadducees were a group of Jews who did not believe in life beyond the grave. (To be honest, the Sadducees weren't interested in what Jesus had to say about eternity.) But notice Jesus firmly put himself into the camp of those who believe in the resurrection. It wouldn't be long until he was making resurrection a reality by his own return from the grave. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him, all are living. When our hearts are heavy with grief at the death of a loved one, Jesus is saying to us, "*But wait! There's more.*"

This is the most important good news that humanity has ever received. Everything else pales in significance. We hear of breakthroughs in the medical community from time to time. News about progress in the fight against cancer and heart disease and diabetes and Alzheimer's. And we are grateful. We want to cling on to life. But deep down in our hearts, we know these are only holding actions. One thing in life remains inevitable—we shall all die. And as it has begun to happen to many of us, we shall all lose people that we love and cherish to death.

But as we hear this good news gift that there is eternity, there is no more good, no more hopeful news that can come to us in our life. You will recall those beautiful words in the Bible by Brother Paul: *“O death where is your victory; O death, where is your sting?”*

Here I would like to tell you about another man named Arthur Stace of Sydney, Australia. Stace earned an unusual nickname during his lifetime—Mr. Eternity!

Stace grew up in desperate circumstances. The son of alcoholics who left him to fend for himself, he rarely went to school, stole to support himself, became addicted to alcohol, and lived on the streets. But in 1930, Arthur Stace heard the message of Jesus Christ and he turned his entire life over to Jesus as his Savior. Inspired by Jesus’ teaching on eternity, Stace began writing the word “Eternity” wherever he went. He tried to keep his new vocation a secret, writing this important word on the sidewalks and the public buildings of Sydney each night. He believed God was calling him to remind others to consider their spiritual state. The citizens of Sydney couldn’t stop talking about the mysterious man who wrote the word “Eternity” on every public place he could reach. They soon named him “Mr. Eternity.” One day, a local pastor discovered the identity of Arthur and interviewed him for a local paper.

Arthur Stace died in 1967 having written the word “Eternity” over half a million surfaces throughout the city of Sydney. In the year 2000, when Sydney hosted the Summer Olympics, city officials honored the memory of Arthur Stace by stringing golden lights across the Sydney Harbor Bridge spelling out one crucial word: “ETERNITY.” No one had to tell Arthur Stace, “But wait! There’s more.”

So what about you? Do you believe there is eternity? Do you believe that there is life beyond the grave? What about us who have lost loved ones to death? Aren’t you looking forward to seeing them again, to being with them forever, side by side? I hope no one has to convince you that there is life beyond the grave. I know sometimes it seems too good to be true; but without eternity, does this life make any sense? When it comes to talking about the hereafter, I like some other words of our brother Paul: *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

Today as we gather, we remember seventy-four of our loved ones who, we trust, are seeing with their own eyes and hearing with their own ears and taking in with their own hearts what God has in store for those who love him.

In the words of a poet, Marjorie Holmes

I know that they live again, that they live again, my dear ones whom I no longer can see.

You have not taken them into a kingdom—they wouldn't be happy in a kingdom—but you have opened wide for them a place of joy and peace and challenge, where their dreams can be fulfilled.

And this place somehow includes my own small portion of the world. They have not really left me, my dear ones, they are close by me in a way they could never be before.

They know how much I miss them. They know how much I love them. They understand about all the things I meant to do for them and didn't, the words I failed to say.

They put their arms around me to comfort me. They tell me, "It's all right, human love is faulty but for all its faults enduring. It goes beyond such things; it goes beyond even this separation. The loss of the body does not mean the loss of that love. There is a new life in which that love is even stronger. For God is love, remember. God is truly love."

And this I know. This God I know. They are with you now—forever. And so with me—forever—in this new dimension of love.

I wish Arthur Schiff, the TV pitchman of commercials, could come back to us this morning and testify, "But wait! There's more." But, of course, we do have someone who has been to the other side, someone who has returned to tell us that there is a room in our Father's House waiting for us when our work is done. That someone is none other than the Lord of Life, Jesus, our brother and companion. And what does he say to us, to those who have gone beyond? "*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.*"