Dear Friends,

I wrote last week about the importance of having ceremony and celebration in our lives to help us be our fullest selves and in creating a healthy human culture. Catholics are famous for our rituals and our parties which make life much richer. This is one of the important reasons the parish is having a party on August 14th to celebrate the end of a year of being socially separated and to celebrate the gift of being a living community.

Another reason to celebrate is to engage in the very Catholic practice of laughing at death. We can laugh at death because our hope is in Jesus. You can see this practiced frequently in countries where a Catholic culture permeates life. For example, the Mexican culture “laughs at death” on the Day of the Dead. The Day of the Dead, celebrated on November 2nd (All Souls) is a holiday to remember deceased loved ones and an invitation for the dead and the living to celebrate together – a communion of saints. Rather than marking this occasion with tears or trembling, Mexicans celebrate with flowers, food, clothes, music, and, of course, colorful skeletons made of candy, wood, and ceramic. People go the cemetery and eat and drink throughout the day in honor of those who have died. Even Disney made a movie about the practice, *Coco.* One popular tradition to celebrate the day is to compose literary calaveras, rhymes about how an individual died or might die. The sarcastic, funny rhymes are so popular they get published in newspapers.

Another culture steeped in Catholicism are the Irish. One of the places where this is quite evident is in the way an Irish wake is celebrated. Even the origin of the word “wake” comes from sitting with a body after death to see if they are really dead or if they might wake up. While they would sit with the body they would tell stories and jokes.

Here is a bit of Irish thought on the subject: “After preparing the body of the deceased, it is preferred that it never stays on its own until the time of the burial…in Ireland, you weren’t supposed to cry unless the preparation was over. Otherwise, evil spirits would gather and take the soul of the dead person instead of it traveling on its own. The wailing would start after the preparation is over, but there was an order in doing so. There had to be a lead keener; she’d be the first woman to weep over the dead body and recite poetry. During that time, all the women shall join in and wail altogether. After the wailing is over, the mourning process starts. To a lot of cultures, this kind of mourning may seem eccentric and peculiar. People in the Irish wake mix between celebration and tears. They would celebrate by drinking and eating a plenty of food. Besides, singing was part of the celebration as well as sharing entertaining and amusing stories about the departed person. Interestingly, they would play games too and have so much fun…the Irish wake in the modern world occurs after the burial. In this celebration, people gather to share stories of the lost loved one and have food and drinks. The Irish wake no longer lasts for days; it only takes a few hours or an entire day at maximum. It is a party where everyone is welcome to attend. Besides, it doesn’t have to be held at the family house. Some people prefer private places; however, you can rent a bar or a restaurant and hold the event there.”

To laugh, to sing, to eat and drink and tell stories. That is what can happen when we put our faith in the God that loves us rather than in our own efforts. What we celebrate at Easter is to be a part of our lives all year long. We are a people who can look into the face of death with love and know that it has been redeemed by Jesus’ death on the cross. Fear does not control us, love does.

Please join us for our Cabrini “Irish Wake” parish celebration on August 14th from 6:00 until 10:00 pm. So that we might know how much food and drink to prepare, please call or email the parish office and let us know that you are coming. Join us as we laugh, sing, eat, drink and tell stories - putting our trust in God!

Peace,

Fr. Damian