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-- In less than two weeks, it will be one year since something significant happened in our parish. Within 13 hours, we lost three active parishioners on Nov. 18, 2015. Two had been dying, but one was rather sudden and unexpected.

-- In over 38 years of priesthood, I had not experienced 3 parishioners dying the same day (2, yes), and I served at a parish where we had 87 funerals one year.

-- These and other events cause us to reflect on what we believe about life after death. And the scriptures give us more food for thought. Remember, the thought of an individual life after death was not really present in the Old Testament until some of the very last books.

-- We hear a passage from one of those later books in our first reading. The setting is less than two centuries before Jesus' own resurrection. A Greek ruler is forcing the people of Israel to conform to a pagan way of life and to violate the Jewish law.

-- One family of seven brothers and their mother refuse to do so. And they are subjected to torture that reminds us of what ISIS is doing to many people in areas of the world it controls today. If you read the full chapter it is pretty gruesome.

-- But they do not buckle under the pressure, even as they are put to death. They persevere because they are confident in the resurrection of the dead. Even their mother comforts them before she is finally put to death herself.

-- By the time Jesus came on the Jewish scene, belief in individual resurrection was still a minority opinion. The Sadducees represented the majority who only accepted teachings in the first five books of the Bible.

-- This is one of the few times Jesus takes sides on an internal Jewish dispute, as he sides with the Pharisees. But, as he does so, he goes deeper into the meaning of resurrection from the dead.

-- Life after death is not just a continuation of our present life under better circumstances. We are transformed into a totally new way of life. We don't know the full details of this new life, but our puny minds probably would not grasp them anyway.

-- That is the hope we hold out for these 23 people listed in our program for this commemoration weekend. It is the hope we hold out for all our loved ones and friends who have passed on.

-- We hold out this hope because our Lord is faithful, as St. Paul tells us. He gave his life for us and wants us to share in his eternal life. Our minds are too small to grasp the full glory of this new life.

-- But we know we will be transformed. It might be good to read the entire 15th chapter of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians to get a better idea of what God has in mind for us in heaven. The rest of the details, though, will be left until we are transformed when God calls us to himself.

-- Meanwhile, we await that time in hope and trust. We may be discouraged now: by our life circumstances, the sufferings of loved ones, even (at least for some of us) by the prospects of the upcoming election.

-- But there is something greater awaiting us. And the challenges we face in this life pale in comparison to the glory God has in mind for us. It is not something we earn; it is God's grace.

-- May we be thankful for that grace. And may we be hopeful for our loved ones from our families and our parish who we believe have passed on to a greater life.