

**Homily – All Souls’ Day (A) / Mass of the Resurrection
November 2, 2014: St. Monica’s (11:00 a.m.)**

Lamentations 3:17-26 – In the face of death, “the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God’s faithfulness never ends.”

Psalm 103: “The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, steadfast in love.”

1 Corinthians 15:51-57 – We shall all be changed – our mortal bodies put on immortality: “Death, where is your sting? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory in Christ.”

John 12:23-26 – “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it dies, it bears a rich harvest. Whoever serves me will be honoured by my Father.”

This weekend, the Church celebrates the twin feasts of “All Saints” and “All Souls”. Both are of ancient origin: as early as the 4th century, the Eastern Church celebrated a solemn memorial of all martyrs, and by the 9th century, it was extended to the whole Church as a way of honouring **all** the saints – martyrs and confessors, monks and mystics, clergy and laity, men and women, famous or obscure, named or anonymous – all those whose lives and deeds continue to inspire us, whose fidelity and holiness shine forth as examples of Christian life.

Alongside this celebration of “All Saints”, we see the development of a parallel feast in which **all** the faithful departed, whatever their condition, were remembered and prayed for. And so November 2nd became the commemoration of all the faithful departed – or more simply, “All Souls Day.” Both feasts are an invitation to trust in the mercy and grace of God. For Jesus came that we might have life, and have it in abundance. Jesus promises the gift of eternal life to all who believe in Him.

Today, we welcome the families and friends of over 30 members of this parish whose funerals took place here over the past twelve months. We also remember all those whose names are written in our “In Loving Memory” books. We carry in our hearts those we love who at this time are sick or dying.

Some of you are here carrying the memory of a deceased spouse, parent, child, or best friend deep in your hearts. Whatever the situation, you know the pain of loss. You are keenly aware of the grief we experience at the death of a loved one. You know how hard it is to say goodbye, to re-engage with life when there is a gnawing emptiness within, a gaping wound which awaits healing.

Today's Scriptures reconnect us with this fundamental experience. In the Book of Lamentations, we see this journey from death to new life situated in the movement from suffering to healing. The stark reality of the pain is acknowledged: "My soul is deprived of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is." Then at a certain point, we begin to trust that God is indeed "kind and merciful." We can dare to hope anew in "the steadfast love of the Lord which is from everlasting to everlasting." But we have to be patient and wait. It happens in God's time, not necessarily our own.

All created things change with time; all that lives sooner or later must die. Death is the ultimate change, the final transition. In John's Gospel, Jesus tells us how this works: "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" Although we know death is a necessary part of the cycle of life, we resist death. So Jesus adds bluntly, "*Those who love their life lose it; and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*"

Does Jesus really want us to "hate" our life? Not in the sense of "despising" it; it is, after all, the first and most precious gift entrusted to us. But it is not the supreme good; in the end, all of us need to go through that final "letting go", the realization we can take nothing with us. We enter this world vulnerable and dependent; we return to our Creator in the same way. So the Lord urges us to stay the course even in the darkness, keeping the flame of hope alive in our hearts. Hope that even in the face of the "sting" of death, we may confess in St. Paul's immortal phrase: "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

What does our Catholic faith teach us? That death is not the final answer. It is not the end, but a time of transition: a movement from time into eternity, from finite existence to infinite love and mercy. As Christians, we trust, we believe that Jesus is faithful to his promises. That his Paschal Mystery traces the pattern of our own lives as well. That no one of us is immortal or invulnerable. The threshold over which our loved ones have passed is one we must all go through, sooner or later. We know that. But we don't like to think about it. And as long as we are young and healthy – our families intact and financially secure – we can forestall those thoughts. But eventually, we all confront it.

Our faith assures us that love is eternal, that the bonds of love can never be severed. We continue to be united to our loved ones who have died. This is the insight behind what we confess each week as our belief in the “communion of saints”. Without denying the reality of physical death, we affirm our eternal connection with our loved ones. In the words of that most famous of poets, “Anonymous”:

*The ship that passes over the horizon is lost to our sight.
But it goes on; it continues to its destination and a safer harbour at last.
Beyond that horizon are other worlds that welcome the traveller.
We live with the conviction – or struggle with the hope –
that life itself is a horizon, and that our journey goes beyond it:
not to darkness but to life.*

So as we remember our faithful departed today, let us be thankful for the gift they were to us here on earth. Let us rejoice that they now enjoy the reward of their labours, resting in the arms of their loving Creator.

**Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord.
And let perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace. Amen.
May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.**