

## Year C All Souls Day

Wisdom of Solomon 3:10-19

1 Peter 1: 3-9

John 11:21-27

Today, four days after All Souls Day, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, we have gathered here today to worship God and in the comfort of our own faith community, to remember those we love and see no longer. For some this All Souls Day will be their first since the death of a loved one, whilst for others it may well be their tenth, or twentieth, or more All Souls Day since they lost a loved one.

Grief is our own personal journey; adjusting to the gaping hole in our life, the company, the tasks shared or tasks the other person did that we took for granted. The shared moments of joy, of life's highs and some of life's lows as well, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health. For some it is the death of a parent, for some the death of a life-partner, for others the death of a child. They all have an impact on us, that changes over time, but I am not sure ever totally heals. The scars of grief we carry, remain; they may become less sore and less obvious to others, scars we may no longer be conscious of every single minute of every day, but they are still there. If we had not loved and fully participated in this crazy collective gathering of cells breathed into life by the Holy Spirit, that is our existence on earth, then we would not have the grief. But we are called to love and be loved. To hopefully experience a love that supports and encourages us to grow and become the best of who we are, seeking our potential whatever that might be, and being part of bringing God's kingdom down to earth.

As I have mentioned before, our culture has done its best to hide death away in the last 100 years. It has done us a great disservice.

Socially and culturally we have lost many of the ways of talking about dying and death, of knowing what to say (or what not to say) comforting those who are grieving. In September 2021 I ran a course called 'Well Prepared', where a group of us explored issues relating to the end of life. I don't think it was too scary, and I pray it helped those who attended to reflect on their lives and be comfortable thinking about and taking practical steps for the stages leading towards the end of our life on earth.

Other cultures are so much better at talking about death and supporting the bereaved. As some of you will know, one of my favourite films is a Spanish film called 'Volver'. The opening scenes are based around All Souls Day, el dia del Muertos. Middle-aged daughters and cousins with their wider families and their children have travelled to a cemetery to tidy up the family grave, to reminisce, with tears and with laughter, and talk to their dead ancestors. For some cultures this is so natural, and I am sure helps with their grieving process. You may think talking to the dead starts to sound like a séance or spiritualist's meeting, but are there not times when you have felt the presence of a loved one who died, or find yourself talking to someone who has died, telling them your news or asking them for advice?

Later on in the film, when there is a family death, everyone gathers to mourn the loss and people are encouraged to grieve. Compare that with the sort of embarrassment we often have when someone starts crying or shows emotion. As a Christian community, I pray that we may all become good companions for any who are grieving; who are willing to sit with those who grieve, to let them cry and talk; who are willing to understand that companionable silence may be what is required, rather than filling every pause with our words, which we are fervently hope are comforting.

Our readings today from scripture, including a reading from the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical book of the Wisdom of Solomon, all,

rather obviously, relate to death. They variously give an insight into the promises of eternal life, although none of them seems to quite give a substantive and very clear picture of what eternal life entails. It is not also clear if a new life in the presence of God commences at the point of death or at the 'last times'. I have read enough theology to find myself often totally confused by the competing claims of those who think they know exactly what happens, and many of them seldom quote any Biblical sources to back up their views.

I think this is where faith really does kick in. Faith not based on 'head stuff', a rational processing of facts, but faith based on my heart and based on trust in God. A trust similar to swimming well out of my depth – relax, float and swim and all will be well; thrash about and tense up and the result won't be good. Trusting in God as our support, our rock and redeemer, our safest of safe places, where we live and move and have our being. And also faith based on personal experience – a strong sense of peace for those we pray for who have died, and of occasional senses that all is well with those I have loved and see no longer, that I believe come from God.

In a few minutes we shall read out the names people have asked me to read out. At the end of that list, if you wish to say someone's name, do come up and say their name into the microphone and light a candle for them.

Remembrance, with tears of sadness and with smiles of fond memories can mingle together in an instant. It is good to call to mind those we have loved no matter how complex the memory, and once more commit them to God's loving care.

And before I finish, I want to read a poem by Martin Wroe, called 'Wave' from his book, *Julian of Norwich's Tea Bag*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Wroe, 2022, *Julian of Norwich's Teabag: Poems and prayers from morning to night*. Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow.