

HOMILY – FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING – 26 NOVEMBER 2017

'Mass of the Bereaved'

Well, here we are together in God's House, for the annual Bereavement Service, which, this year is incorporated into the Vigil Mass for the Feast of Christ the King, the last Sunday in the Church's year. A day when we commemorate that the Kingdom of God will never end, his reign is eternal.

For us, in the northern hemisphere, the month of November is an appropriate time to particularly remember our loved ones who have died. November coincides with autumn, a season when nature dies, the leaves fall from the trees, darkness descends and old soldiers gather at the Cenotaph with their poppies and medals. As I mentioned earlier, it is the last days of the Church's year, finishing in seven days. So, it is reflected in Holy Scripture, the apocalyptic readings, talking of judgement, the end times, being ready to meet God. "Stay awake, you never know the date or the hour". But let us connect this with why many of us are also here. Many of us have experienced the death of those we love dearly, in the past year. The experience of death brings all sorts of emotions, feelings, beliefs and reactions. We all have to be able to grieve in our own way. The stages of grieving can change from shock to bewilderment, to sadness, to anger, to emptiness, to memories, to aloneness and perhaps consolation. Into the 'mix' of death is our own attitude to relationships, to faith and to what life is all about.

Some of us want to 'turn the page' and move on, others just can't 'turn the page' and wish life to be back to what it always was. St Paul teaches us that, 'just as all men die in Adam, so all men will be brought to life in Christ'. Jesus, the Son of God, by his own death and resurrection, shows us the distinction between seeking to live forever and inheriting eternal life.

If we want to inherit eternal life, the prescription is laid down by Jesus in today's Gospel. When I was hungry you fed me, when I was naked you clothes me, when I was sick or in prison, you came to see me.

St Thomas Aquinas described eternal life as 'the joyful companionship of all the blessed, a companionship which is full of delight, since each one will possess all good things together with all the blessed'.

Another priest described Heaven as the ultimate secret to be revealed by the Universe.

We grieve because we love those who have died. How hard is it to grieve for those we have not loved. Humanity is imperfect. God knows that. So that is why he sent His Son as the 'Good Shepherd'. We cannot be sure that all those we love have inherited eternal life. That would be presumptuous. So, we pray for them. We pray for their souls and to be purified, if that is what they require.

The Catechism, the teaching of the Catholic Church, tells us that, "each person will be rewarded immediately after death, in accordance with his/her words and faith. Each person receiving an eternal retribution in their immortal soul, at the very moment of their death, in a particular judgement that refers to their life in Christ, either entrance to the blessedness of Heaven, a period of purification or everlasting damnation".

Damnation, as St John Paul puts it, "consists precisely in definitive separation from God, freely chosen by the human person and confirmed with death that seals their choice forever".

Of course, it is our hope and desire that those we love, who have died, will inherit eternal life, that we will enjoy their unhindered friendship in the Kingdom of Heaven.

I personally doubt that many end up in Hell. I think you have to be determined to be evil to go to Hell. But let God be the judge of us all. Let us pray in hope and love, for those near to us, who have died. May our time here this evening be a measure of how much we love them and desire to see them again in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Just remember again the reply of Jesus to the repentant thief on the cross. "Today you will be with me in Paradise".

God Bless you all.