



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

**32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A
Remembrance Sunday**

We do not mourn as those without hope

Readings: Wisdom 6: 12-16, Ps 62, 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18, Matthew 25: 1-13

Many years ago, when serving at the Abbey Church of St. Alban under the great Dean and dear friend, Peter Moore, we were asked to pray for the life of a small child who was in extremis. We did so, along with many other local churches. The child died. We were invited to the funeral at the small free church tabernacle where the child's family worshipped and where the funeral was to be held. The grief was tangible and the sorrow overwhelming that this beautiful life had been cut short so tragically and unexpectedly.

The service, to our astonishment, reflected none of this. From the opening sentence the minister exhorted us 'not to weep or be sad'. It was, he said, our Christian duty to be joyful. We were then treated to two hours of jolly music, uplifting testimony and exhortation to 'keep our chins up.' The basis for this manufactured enthusiasm was the Resurrection hope and especially St. Paul's exhortation, in today's letter, 'not to grieve like other people do who have no hope' i.e. non – believers.

I left this ghastly endurance test with an unpleasant taste in my mouth and a deep pity for the grieving parents who had had to sit through this exercise in grave misunderstanding.

St. Paul did not tell us 'not to grieve' at all. That would be inhuman. He did tell us that, 'We are not to grieve like those without hope.' Even Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus.

For human beings to pretend that 'Death is nothing at all....' As that ghastly passage by Canon Henry Scott Holland insists, a favourite of the Crematorium, is what Sheridan caricatured as 'the lie direct'.

Death is massive. Death is the most radical discontinuity conceivable for the human person. It is a process that affects all that is created with life. Biological death means that the organism's reconstructive powers have failed to maintain themselves. The enemies of health and integrity and cohesion can no longer be held at bay. Death is a result of a fundamental change in the economy of animated matter.

All matter has form and shape from the smallest grain, through to the most ancient planet. And all will, sooner or later, disintegrate. Its form will change. We are the dust of dead stars and, as the burial service and the great Ash Wednesday rite reminds us, 'unto dust shall we return'.

We cannot be unmoved by its terrifying power nor deny its ability to bring us down in sorrow. Christ Jesus did not come to transform us into insensitive creatures with an anaesthetised response to reality but rather to stand with us, in the face of Man's last enemy. So we do not dance round the Cross on Good Friday whooping with laughter, though we know the

truth of the Resurrection. We are mindful of the cost of sin and death that has engaged the love of God in Christ in our salvation.

As Christians, we mourn the death of our fellow man. If death were such a jolly process then we would have little quarrel with the suicide cults or the tyrants and torturers that have disfigured humanity or the eugenicists who are always seeking new ways to kill the vulnerable.

In the season of the Dead, November, we rejoice at the triumph of the Saints in glory, those in whom the victory of the Cross is completed. We pray for the Holy Souls making their way through the purification into the eternal Presence of God. We stand before the cenotaphs of the fallen in our high streets and on our village greens, remembering those whose lives were offered for the defeat of tyranny and who have paid the price of the sins of the nations.

Christians mourn because they are human. We are affected by the love of those we see no longer. BUT 'we do not mourn as those without hope.'

If our season of prayer for and with the dead ends simply in tears and despair, then we have not heard the Gospel. We stand foursquare in Christ, in His death and in His Resurrection. We stand at the foot of the Cross and see the cost of our sin and the shattering fragility of our humanity in the face of death. But we also stand in the light of the Resurrection, inheritors of the miracle and mystery of the Third Day.

We do not look forward to the process of dying but we do not fear death.

We weep at the grave of every Lazarus, our friend and brother, yet we know that, as the dawn rises on the farther shoreline we will meet again in the eternal life of the Risen Christ. In this season of the dead we, the dying, must redouble our prayers for those who have gone before and more especially for our fellow mortals who, as yet without Christ, will die without hope.

The mission goes on.

It is not an optional extra. It is a matter of life or death.

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