



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed (All Souls)

A connected people

Readings: Isaiah 25: 6-9, Ps 26, Romans 5: 5-11, Mark 5: 33-39; 16: 1-6

A much-loved Anglican relative died earlier this year Her vicar was a good man and did an excellent job of caring for her in her lifetime and caring for us in our bereavement. We shared the service and have kept in touch. Recently he wrote to invite us to the annual memorial service for those who had died in the last year. If we wished then a bulb would be planted in the churchyard in her memory. What they could not do, according to their Protestant convictions, was to pray for the souls of the deceased.

This is a founding principle of the breakaway churches of the Reformation. Appalled by the 'money raising' activities of the corrupt hierarchy of the time, the 'reformers' threw the baby out with the bathwater. Prayers for the departed had gone from a solemn devotion, memorial and thanksgiving to the source of extraordinary revenue. The more you paid, the more we prayed, the quicker purgatory was done and heaven entered. The revulsion at this Simoniacal deformity of the nature of God's mercy has shaped the Protestant culture ever since. There is, according to Protestantism, no point in praying for the dead because we cannot change God's mind. They are either 'in' or 'out'. We are utterly disconnected from those who have gone before us.

To a Catholic this would seem to be utterly 'barking' and a denial of the Resurrection life. If we are in Christ then, though death may separate us, it can never divide us. Furthermore, death does not stop us loving the departed. What do we do with that love? Its natural outpouring is in prayer, praying that love into the central love of God which is revealed in the Sacrifice of Calvary and re-presented every time we offer the Mass. This is our continuing connection, our place of Communion. For Catholics, remembrance is not simply an act of diminishing human memory but rather that place where the past, present and future are re-membered that is to say, brought together in the eternity of God.

We worship a God whose name is revealed as I AM. He alone lives in the eternal present where past and future gather. In Him we live and move and have our being, Scripture tells us. Before Him all that is and was and will be are gathered. It is into this great gathering that we are called and to which, in our prayers and the Mass, we are linked in an unbroken chain of love.

The secular world, formed largely by its Protestant heritage, has an annual 'remembrance' at its war memorials, to remember what most there have never known. The Catholic Church has a daily remembrance, which is the Mass, in which Heaven and Earth meet – in which time and eternity co-inhere and where the mortal is invested with immortality. That Remembrance brings together, in Christ, the Church Militant here on earth, the Church undergoing the Purification in Purgatory and The Church Triumphant in Heaven.

The whole People of God swept up into the divine life. To proclaim anything less is to diminish the glory of God and to reduce the understanding of His love and to deny our own God-given instincts to participate in that love in life, in death and in eternity. We are family and we are a connected people.