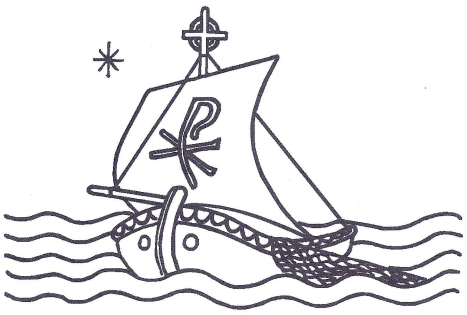


The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls) 2026

Homily by Fr Robbie Low

Readings: Wisdom 3:1-9, Ps 23; Romans 5:5-11; John 6: 37-40

There is always a sense of ‘After the Lord Mayor’s Show’ on All Souls Day.

We have sung our hearts out and gloried in the triumph of those recognised individuals whose holiness has been recognised by the Universal Church. We have revelled in the knowledge that, accompanied by their prayers, we battle on against the forces of darkness, in the world and in ourselves in the certain knowledge that, in following Christ alone, we are indeed, as the old evangelical chorus puts it, ‘ON THE VICTORY SIDE’. The remarkable range, response, fortitude, passion and, let’s be honest, eccentricities of those who adorn our calendar in Red and Gold, is both dazzling and encouraging as well as intimidating and seemingly out of our reach.

Today is, at once, more pedestrian fare but every bit as important and, in very direct ways, more emotional and closer to home. We gather, in the penumbra of the Holy Ones to pray for those that we have personally known and loved, whose virtues may or may not have been very obvious but whose hope was nevertheless, like ours, in the Word made flesh. Our prayers for them, as they labour through the Purification, the Purgatory, are of singular importance and impact. As our little mortal time ticks by into the same eternity, our offerings of love have a

poignancy and power far beyond our hope or understanding. Each Mass for those who journey on into the heart of God is an act of love, a balm of Gilead to the striving soul, water in the desert for the committed traveller to the Promised Land. Our company is both a reminder of our relationship with them, separated by Death but unbroken by it as both of us dwell in the Body of the Risen Christ. We are, both of us, in a living Communion as we continue to pray for one another until the great reunion.

This truth of the faith is not to be confused with the implausible and ridiculous heresy that provoked the tragedy of the Reformation.
You will recall that the chief fundraiser for the Pope, Tetzel, was quoted by Luther as offering 'grace for cash' with the ridiculous jingle -
'Each coin that in the coffer chings - A soul to Paradise does spring'

The prayer for the souls of the departed does not have a mechanical effect rather it is an assertion of that unbreakable relationship of love that is exemplified in Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and is part of our gift to one another as we follow in His Way.
When the Reformation closed and destroyed the Chantry chapels of Christendom, they not only removed the blight of Tetzel's unbridled spiritual capitalism, but left their half of Christendom with no part to play and no place for abiding love in the economy of life and death and the life to come.

We do not 'change God's mind' by our prayers for each man must respond to God in his own lifetime. But we do, by so praying, acknowledge that our faith is one of genuine relation with God and one another. For a Catholic, the Faith is one of relationship not magic.
As we know, from frequent attendance at funerals of non-Catholics, Protestants go straight to Heaven. A magic wand is waved over the outstanding grime of sin and all is duly sorted. Catholics, where the Faith is still faithfully preached, know that by Apostolic Pardon, in the Last Rites of the Church, our sins are forgiven but the healing of their weight and effect are purged in that fire of God's love that we call the Purgatory. Few, if any, of us die perfect and the process of us becoming ready for the Eternal Presence and aiding each other on the journey is rightly the continuing business of our prayers. As my great friend, Fr Basil, always

says, when Purgatory is derided as old fashioned,
‘Why go to Heaven as you are……and spoil it !’

And so Holy Souls Day engages us, perhaps less romantically than All Saints but with a deep and heartfelt intensity for all those we love and see no longer – but with whom we await re-union in Eternity in Christ. The Mass is such a wonderful gift that I am always amazed by the gaps in the Mass intentions list here - as if we had not enough people, both departed and living, to pray for.

All Saints Day inspires us with the reminder of those in glory who intercede for us and cheer us on our way. All Souls rekindles the fire of love on the altar of our hearts for those we love and refocuses our minds on the urgent preparations for the joyful journey that, ere long, yet lies ahead of us.

For all of us these great feasts draw us back to the centre of our Faith of which Penitence and Thanksgiving are the twin engines.
In the vital quest for the absolution of our sins we find ourselves, quite naturally, in the Confessional and thence, set free, to the Altar of the Sacrifice where we join the celebration with the whole Church, Militant on Earth, Triumphant in Heaven and Homeward bound in the Purification.

There we can truly celebrate the saving and liberating love of God in the re-presentation of Sacrifice of Jesus, in the Offering of the Mass and take the knowledge of that blessing out into our world.

There is much to do before nightfall.
Let’s get to it.