

Homily for the Remembrance Service 2nd November 2022

November is the month of the Holy Souls and today is the feast day of the Holy Souls, so it is appropriate that we have gathered here this evening to open up a little space in our minds and hearts to remember those we have loved who have died and gone before us. The reality of death, the inevitability of the death of those we love and indeed our own death as well should be an important part of our life of faith because death, properly embraced and understood, can add an intense richness to each day of our life which lies ahead.

The Church gives us a gift in the consoling doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

Each of us is here this evening because we have been wounded, in different ways, by the death of a loved one, especially in the past few years through the cruel circumstances of the Covid pandemic. All deaths need gentle closure, but so many of us were cut off from the important rituals so necessary to the process of mourning. We were left with a profound sense of not having properly said goodbye. There had been no closure.

In some cases, the wounds may now be gently healing, but the scars will be with us for life.

When somebody close to us dies, as well as being a sad occasion, it can also be an occasion of great grace, because we are reminded in a very powerful way how fragile the gifts of life and health are, how quickly the years just fly by, and how we should try to cherish and live that life to the full.

We become very conscious of all the good times and happy times we were able to share with them, and we thank God for that, but there is also perhaps a feeling of regret and sadness for all the things we left unsaid and undone.

This is part of the pain that many of us are still feeling because we believe it is too late, and now nothing can be done about it. Not so. We now must learn to look at death through the eyes of faith and as people of faith. Our faith teaches us that at death life is changed, not ended. After death we participate in a new way in what is called the Communion of Saints.

Properly understood the Communion of Saints allows us to realise that it is not too late, can never be too late, to express our feelings, our unspoken feelings to our loved ones.

It is never too late to tell our deceased loved ones how we really feel about them.

It is never too late to apologise for the ways we might have hurt them.

It is never too late to ask their forgiveness for our negligence in our relationship with them.

It is never too late to speak the words of love, appreciation, affirmation, and gratitude we should have spoken to them whilst they were alive.

As Christians we have the great consolation of knowing that death is not final, that it is never too late.

Some people desperately need that particular consolation, and that second chance.

No matter who we are, we are constantly inadequate in our relationships. We cannot always be present to our loved ones as we should; we may perhaps sometimes say things in anger and bitterness that leave deep scars; we betray trust in all kinds of ways; and we mostly lack the maturity, self-confidence, and the affirmation we should be conveying to those we hold dear.

None of us fully measure up.

The great Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner says that none of us ever experiences what he calls the 'Full Symphony' in this life. He is not just referring to the fact that none of us ever fully realises our dreams, he's also referring to the fact that in all of our important relationships none of us is ever perfect. At the end of the day all of us lose loved ones with unfinished business and perhaps bad timing.

There are always things that should have been said that were not, and there are always things that should not have been said that were.

So now is a good time to re-discover the possibilities and consolations offered by the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. To make it real it is never too late. Our departed loved ones hold us close in their hearts before God. Speak to them, say perhaps the things left unsaid, involve them in the difficulties and challenges in the years yet to come, and more importantly, be the fullness of all we can be to those who now walk beside us in our present journey.

There is a beautiful Jewish prayer that expresses it perfectly: -

At the rising of the sun, and at its going down, we can remember them.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of the spring winter, we do remember them.

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring, we do remember them.

At the blueness of the skies, and in the warmth of summer, we do remember them.

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of autumn, we do remember them.

At the beginning of the year and when it ends, we do remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live; for they are now a part of us as we can remember them.

When we are weary, and in need a strength, we can remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart, we can remember them.

When we have joy we crave to share, we can remember them.

When we have decisions that are difficult to make, we can remember them.

When we have achievements that are based on theirs, we do remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live; for they are now a part of us as we do remember them.

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace and one day rise in glory.

Amen.