

Homily for the Remembrance Service 2nd November 2023

We are now in the month of November, the month of the Holy Souls, and today is the feast of the Holy Souls, so it is opportune that this evening we take a little time to think about death itself; those we have loved who have died, and about the inevitability of our own death as well. By dipping into the richness of Christ's teachings we can soften the hurt and pain that accompanies death and dying.

It is true to say that death wounds us all in some way or another; wounds that given time will gently heal, but the scars of those wounds may be with us for life. When somebody close to us dies, as well as being a sad occasion, he can also be an occasion of great grace as well, 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.

When a loved one dies we become very conscious of all the good times and the happy times we were able to share with them, and thank God for that, but there is also perhaps a feeling of regret and sadness for all of the things left unsaid and undone, as there must be in any human life. This is part of the pain that many of us are still feeling because we feel it was too late, and that now nothing can be done about it. Not so. We now have to learn to look at death through the eyes of faith as people of faith. Our faith teaches us that at death life is changed, not ended, and that after death we participate in a new way in what is called the Communion of Saints.

The Communion of Saints means 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 is also referring to the fact that in all of our important relationships none of us ever fully measure up. 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. 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 remember them.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of the spring winter,

We remember them.

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring,

We remember them.

At the blueness of the skies, and in the warmth of summer,

We remember them.

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of autumn,

We remember them.

At the beginning of the year and when it ends,

We remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live;

For they are now a part of us

As we remember them.

When we are weary, and in need a strength,

We remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart,

We remember them.

When we have joy we crave to share,

We remember them.

When we have decisions that are difficult to make,

We remember them.

When we have achievements that are based on theirs,

We remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live;

For they are now a part of us

As we 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.