

33rd Sunday (B)

15th November 2015

'November dead'

Dan 12: a time of great distress
know decay
Mk 13: 24–32: *the second coming*

Ps 15: You will not let Your beloved
Heb 10: Christ has offered one single sacrifice for sins

I was in St Albans on Thursday, and after Mass I walked back from church to my parents' house through the Park, as I have done, countless times, in all the different seasons, since being a boy. On Thursday it was actually rather sunny, and all the different trees were showing their various colours: it's one of the joys of autumn! But autumn is a season which some love, and others loathe: the autumnal colours and the fallen leaves are really rather lovely, but then the closing-in of the days and the increasing wet and cold is not so lovely. We begin to long for the return of the spring and the warm. It's no surprise that the Church places at this time of year the remembrance of the dead, is it? As nature is dying back, so we turn our minds to the dead of our acquaintance. And on this middle weekend of November, we are specially remembering the 26 deceased parishioners of the past year.

But we do so — we remember the dead — as if (as

in nature) there is a promised return to something lovelier. Imagine if we were facing November with no Spring to follow! How depressing would that be! Seeing the leaves fall for ever; the darkness get darker for ever. Instead it's precisely the hope of Spring that gets us through these dark, damp days. And so with death: we are saddened by the death of our loved ones, whether they had a short or a long life, a healthy one or a sick one, we miss them, but we have real and well-founded hope that springs eternal.

As this church year comes to an end with this month of November, the readings urge us to real Christian hope in the face of death ... Daniel's prophecy of the end of time (in the 1st reading) and Jesus's description of the end too (in the Gospel) both set scenes of hope alongside the disasters. Daniel speaks of *those who lie sleeping in the dust of the earth: many will awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting disgrace* (a distinction we would equate with the difference between heaven and hell). And then Jesus Himself says: *They will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory,*

... [and] send His angels to gather His chosen from the ... ends of the world ... Clearly there is resurrection and glory promised us by God in the face of death. And this brings us to offer our prayers and Masses for the dead. We know that God's desire for humanity is that we spend our eternity with Him in heavenly happiness. But we are very unlikely to be immediately ready for heaven when we die. A few saints may be, but the rest of us will definitely need that purifying, and painful, time of Purgatory to have the rust of sin burnt off, and be prepared for the glory of God's holy presence. It's the prayers and Masses of the Church here on earth that help the souls in Purgatory get through to that heavenly reward. The Mass is, as the 2nd reading says, that *one single sacrifice for sins* which Christ has offered on the Cross and in His resurrection. Jesus Christ, the Risen One, he is the one access to the resurrection, and so when we contemplate death, we know that there is no better place to come than the Mass; no-one better to come to than Jesus Christ. Here we receive truly comforting encouragement in the face of death: a real and lasting

peace comes to us by associating the death of our loved ones (and indeed one day our own death) with the triumph of Jesus over death. He it is who has real and Godly power over life and death, and He isn't reluctant to share it with us. *By virtue of that one single offering, He has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom He is sanctifying.* His light shines very powerfully in the midst of darkness and sorrow. We have to have our eyes open to His holy light, however, or else it falls on us to no effect.

Let's take this Mass as a special occasion to pray for our deceased friends and family. It's not through our own efforts that they will come to heaven, but through the power of the Risen Son of God: but it *is* our place to plead and pray for that. We would be neglecting our Christian duty if we did not pray for the dead. They were good to us in life; one day they will do good for us in heaven; in the meantime, we keep the repose of the Holy Souls in fervent prayer here at Mass. We can do nothing better for them than that! *Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace.*