



32nd Week of the Year and November Prayer for the Departed: 6th/7th November
Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“I shall be filled when I awake, with the sight of your glory, O’Lord” (Psalm 16)

When my friend asked for someone to celebrate Mass on All Saints and All Souls Days, at St Peter’s, Bromsgrove, I could not say “no”, since I was able and wanted to make time for it. Why? They are 2 days that touch us personally: they lead us to think and to pray about life and death; about being prepared for our own “Passover”/our passing. Despite all our dreams of immortality, death remains an obligatory passage. It is a word “laden with meaning for those of us who have Faith: it is the door through which Christ Jesus passed before us to bring us to eternal life” writes Dominique Greiner in *La Croix*.

As a Priest, of course, I am often involved in helping the bereaved at the time of the death of a loved one: I go and see them; give them copies of readings from Scripture to make a choice; explain the Order of Service; and show them brochures that others have prepared. Then, especially if I have not known the deceased, I ask them to prepare a bio for me. One of the matters that often comes up these days is “dementia”. Parents who were full of life and played a part in the family have gradually drifted away from them, as the brain has contracted due to this terrible disease, which affects all types and levels of society. The fact that you have a PH.D from Cambridge doesn’t mean you are going to escape it: just the day before yesterday I was with such a family, and last evening, back in my old parish, I was speaking with someone whose Dad has the beginnings of it. I was saying to him: I think Boris doesn’t get credit for some of the good things he has done such as setting aside funding for research into this terrible disease so that a vaccine/a cure can be found in the way it has with Covid 19.

The passage from life through death to eternal life can be an almighty challenge for an individual and their loved ones. That is why, it seems to me, some people want to fix the time if their death through Euthanasia: they don’t want the Cross, and we don’t either!

In this month of November we embrace the Cross; it is the way shown us by Jesus, the way to new life. He Himself said in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Father ... if you are willing take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine”. He also said: “Take up your Cross and follow me”. I was thinking: “when I’m on the way from this world, I would like people round me praying the Rosary that I may pass into eternal life”. I met another family at this goodbye to the Parish Priest as he begins a new ministry: I always remember the family round their mother in prayer as she passed, and they invited me to join them for a little while with prayer, a blessing and anointing with Holy Oil. Spending those moments seems to me to be what Jesus desired as he was about to pass to the Father: “could you not spend one hour with me?”

In this month of November, we think of our loved ones who have departed this world and visit the place of their interment if we can: remembering the words of Scripture “it is

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a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be released from their sins”.

I will be doing that at Oscott College this week praying for deceased Priests and Bishops; praying for my parents in the cemetery there. On the Sundays of November I will visit cemeteries with other priests from the Deanery area to pray and bless the graves of parishioners’ loved ones.

On All Souls Day we had much to celebrate in the Liturgy. I liked these words of Jesus from the Gospel: “I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. Now it is the will of Him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, and that I should raise it up on the last day.”

Those words are complimented by the words in Psalm 16, the Responsorial Psalm for the 32nd Sunday “I shall be filled when I awake, with the sight of your glory, O Lord.” As we stand before the resting place of our loved ones in November and give thanks for their love, praying for their eternal repose, our thoughts and prayers can turn to these words and to the prayer of St Paul in 2 Thessalonians, the second reading for the 32nd Sunday “may the Lord turn your hearts towards the love of God and the fortitude of Christ.” The Lord Jesus points us to the God of “the living” in quoting the passage from Exodus where God speaks to Moses in the Burning Bush in the Gospel of the day. The Sadducees who Jesus encounters, and who did not believe in the Resurrection, are challenged by Jesus to believe. Death is not the end of our journey: we are so to live as to be ready to enter the Kingdom of God. St Paul again, says this prayer: “may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father who has given us his love...comfort you and strengthen you in everything good that you do or say.”

November is not only about looking back, but looking forward in Thanksgiving and Hope, inspired by those who have gone before us.

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