

**Homily; All Souls Day; November 2, 2021; Church of the Ascension, Chicago.
Rev. Dr. Robert Petite; Assisting Priest.**

“ . . . this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.” John 6.

In the Name of

On this the day of All-Soul's, I experience a heightened awareness of being an orphan. My parents died many years ago. In remembering them, I'm often occupied with feelings of missed opportunities and even some regret. Could I have done more for them than I did? Perhaps some of you have this experience as well.

However, alongside these feelings of missed opportunities, there are also feelings of gratitude for their continuing and supportive presence in my life even now. I believe it's the experience of grief, the price we all pay for love, that causes us to be aware of the continuing presence of our departed loved in our lives. Even in death, love continues to unfold and our communion with loved one often deepens.

Our experience of grief always has a story attached to it. As we grieve our loved ones, we share stories about them, over and over again, down through the years. It is these remembered stories of our parents, and stories of other loved ones, that heightens their continuing presence in our lives. Because someone has died, does not necessarily mean the relationship has ended. This is a spiritual truth as much as it is a psychological one.

Today on All Souls Day, we remember the stories of those “ordinary saints”, the quiet and obscure, those whose faithful ordinary lives have deeply touched our own. They are our family members, our neighbors, and friends, who have been our companions on the Way.

We remember each by name, light candles in their memory, and pray that “they may rest in peace and rise in glory.” We Christians have been doing this remembering in one form or another since the 2nd. Century.

What does it really mean for us Christians, to remember the faithful departed? The first thing we can say is that this commemoration celebrates the breadth of the Christian community, that Mystical Body of Christ that has as its members all the followers of the Christian Way, both past and present. Our remembering is a celebration of the co-inherence of a present and an eternal reality that transcends both time and place. Today, and especially in this Liturgy, we dwell within the thin space between the living and the dead.

The second thing we can say, is that we all join God's own remembering of us and our departed loved ones. It is the nature of God to re-member, to put back together that which has been broken. That great repair, that holding of us in God's hands, and re-membering, is in no way dependent on our own effort. All that is needed, for us and for the departed, is to simply turn and face God's remembering and holding of us; to remember God's love for us, and for one another. Our very being and existence is dependent upon God's own remembering.

The witness of the Scriptures is that God's remembering of us is steadfast. “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands . . . Isa. 49:15-16.

What can we say about the faithful departed? The witness of Scriptures for this day is that “their hope is full of immortality”, (Wisdom 3:4); that they “dwell in God’s love.” (Wisdom 3:9b.). St. Paul literally shouts from the rooftops that at the very heart of the Christian Way, is a deep mystery, that involves a great transformation, for the living and the dead. (I Cor. 15:51-52)

What is also clear in the Scriptures, is that with a good will and by God's grace, the living and the dead will come to fulfilment. A mentor of mine once said: “When we speak of the "faithful departed", we mean those whose final choice, . . . was for the good.” God’s love and faithfulness, always places before the living and the dead, the possibility of the continuing choice of that good.

“Do we pray for or with the departed”? Perhaps a little of both. We pray that God’s deep and mysterious love will continue to work in them as in us. As the 1928 Prayer Book prays: “*having opened to them the gates of larger life, thou wilt receive them more and more into thy joyful service*”. *Grant them continual growth in thy love and service*” (BCP 1928) We pray that God’s love and mercy will bring our spiritual journey, and theirs, to an ultimate fulfillment. And finally, we pray that we shall all join the heavenly throng and achieve a purity of heart which finally wills the one thing necessary, God’s goodness, love, and truth. Amen. +