

## *Their Sermon*

Homily for the All Souls Requiem Mass  
November 2, 2019  
Church of the Ascension, Chicago  
The Very Rev. Patrick Raymond

Wisdom 3:1-9  
1 Corinthians 15:50-58  
John 5:24-27

Those of us who preach and who take it seriously often imagine that the sermon is a main focal point of what we call the Liturgy of the Word, the first half of the mass, from the Introit to the Peace. When those of you in the pews glance at your watches, I sometimes see the discrepancy between how seriously I have taken the sermon and how seriously you feel it should be taken!

In the case of this particular mass – the All Souls Requiem – I wonder if a focal point more important than the sermon is the recitation and praying of names of the dead that we will share and lift up before God in a few moments. If that is the case, as I believe it may be, then this message should be spare. Perhaps I am proposing that the Litany of names *is* the sermon. Or maybe I'd like to ask you to think of each of 140 names that we will read and pray as its own sermon, the name being a distillation of both lessons from this life and also eternal perspectives.

If the 140 souls whose names we will pray were to find common ground in their faith, and if they were to collectively preach a short message to us today, I wonder what they would emphasize. Given the context of All Souls Day, I wouldn't be surprised if they were to emphasize the largely forgotten concept of the fear of the Lord.

If so, I doubt that they would be endorsing the manipulative power so often wielded by religions. By fear of the Lord they would mean a humble recognition of our fleeting mortality. They would mean the hair-raising and life-changing recognition that all we are and all we have relies on God and God's provision, and God's mercy – our eternal fate, yes, but also each breath, each day, each blessing, known or unknown, seen or unseen, acknowledged or missed. And yes, by the fear of God they would be taking into account our human gravitational pull toward hell – insincerity, betrayal, violence, mockery, all that separates us from the heart and will of God.

In addition to commending the fear of the Lord, these souls might remind us to stick to and persevere in the basics: faith, hope, love. Their message would be illustrated by examples from their own lives: all that endeared them to us, all that we now invoke as an example when naming our own aspirations. They would urge us to persevere in our own pursuit of these qualities and gifts in every realm of our lives. They would remind us that these gifts from God are not to be hoarded but are intended to be unselfishly, sometimes sacrificially, shared with others, not only family and friends, but neighbors and strangers, even sometimes enemies. Faith, hope and love.

At the time my father died, ten years ago, I had a series of amazing dreams, including one, exactly a week after his death, that I recorded in my journal as follows: *“My father left his heart – his living heart – the flesh of it, the living spirit of it, the passion and spirit and appetite-for-life of it, the substance of it, the essence of it, the eternal gift of it – he left it in his will to his children and grandchildren. We gathered in the kitchen of my parents' home, standing around a large, well-lit butcher block with sharp knives, dividing it. I received [some of my father's heart] for myself and also other parts for my family – Brooke, Eliot, Owen and Grace. I was putting all of these beloved parts of my father's heart in bakery gift-boxes – the kind with the cellophane windows, and I was festooning them with orchids and fresh fruits.”*

Forgive me if I'm being self-indulgent by telling this dream. But I wonder if it may partly illustrate why you and I gather here today. I believed when I woke from that dream and continue to believe that it was about the gifts of life and faith that my father sought to impart to me and others in my family, both throughout his life and in his death and beyond.

And what about the souls we are here to recall today? They no doubt yearn to yield the gifts of their lives and their hearts to and for the good of our own faith, hope and love. They have so richly blessed us. How will their examples embolden us to profoundly and faithfully pour out our lives and hearts, in God's name, for others? *Amen.*