

Their Sermons

Homily for the All Souls Requiem Mass, November 2, 2020

Church of the Ascension, Chicago • The Very Rev. Patrick Raymond

In peace we pray to you, Lord God.

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Grant to your whole Church in paradise and on earth, your light and peace.

Grant that all who have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection may die to sin and rise to newness of life, and that through the grave and gate of death we may pass with him to our joyful resurrection.

Grant to us who are still in our pilgrimage, and who walk as yet by faith, that your Holy Spirit may lead us in holiness and righteousness all our days.

Grant to all who mourn a sure confidence in your fatherly care, that, casting all their grief on you, they may know the consolation of your love.

Grant us grace to entrust to your never-failing love the souls of all the Faithful Departed, particularly those we now call to mind and name ... - Prayers from the All Souls Requiem

The All Souls Requiem presents a preaching opportunity unlike any other throughout the year. The opportunity arises only indirectly from the appointed Scriptures and mainly from the remembered lives of those whose names we will recite and pray in a few moments.

Imagine with me for a moment that each of the 140+ names that we will read and pray may yield its own sermon. We may receive a distillation of lessons learned in this life, or perhaps an eternal perspective from the other side, not yet fully available to any of us.

What impression is left on us, for instance, by the name 'Sister Barbara?' known to so many of us. Depending on how we knew her, the message elicited by her name might be one of gentleness. Or, conversely, fierceness. She *could* be fierce. Or we might receive a humbling message about how to be utterly worldly poor and yet strikingly eternally rich.

Also on our necrology for this mass is Bishop James Montgomery. As with Sr. Barbara, many of us have our Bishop Montgomery memories and stories. Those stories are unique to each of us, but common themes of faith would no doubt coalesce if we exchanged those stories: 'My faith was deepened.' 'I was saved from some folly.' 'A nagging burden was lifted.'

Alongside the names of St. Barbara and Bishop Montgomery, our necrology mostly includes those known to only one or a few of us. We ask for these names to be included because of love, or respect, or sorrow, or some measure of all these motives, or for other reasons. In most or all cases these souls shaped our lives and faith for good. We are lit up, we are renewed, we are encouraged to persevere in faith as we recall moments of generosity, or guidance, or rescue, or compassion. 'That's when I understood forgiveness.' 'He embodied true joy.' 'She was a prophet.' In so many instances, these souls and our key moments with them have contributed to who we are and who we aspire to be in ways that were and are as meaningful and effective as any sermon.

Rather than fill any more time now with a sermon that is not meant to be my sermon, allow me to sit down, first inviting you for just one minute, to allow one person from your list to take my place here. As you listen to her or his life, ask yourself: *What was the message of her or his life that was meant for me, or for the world?*

Or, if you prefer, I welcome you to imagine the All Souls Requiem at which your name will be on the list. And ask yourself: *What is the sermon that others' memories of me will have left behind?*