

The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber

11.2.25

The Feast of All Souls

We are here this evening to honor all souls, all the faithful departed. To pray for the people who have gone before and to pray with them. We will read the names of people in our community who we have lost in this past year, and we will honor the whole communion of saints, those who have died this year and in all years past.

This particular year, this St Martin's community has lost many beloved people. There are many here who are freshly and mightily grieving. And because grief basically never goes away but just becomes a part of us, because grief can come up as if the loss had happened yesterday on anniversaries or days like today, many others here are feeling pangs of grief as we remember the loved ones we have lost in years past.

This is one reason we pray for our loved ones who have died. We cannot speak with them in person. We can't embrace them. But we can pray for them, we can say their names and remember their faces and remind ourselves that we believe in resurrection, remind ourselves of the faith that tells us they are continuing in new life, somehow.

We can pray for them. We can remind ourselves of our faith. We can remind ourselves that they have passed into new life.

We can remind ourselves of a sad and also consoling truth, that death is a part of life, it is always with us. People die. Friends move away. Our friends, or parents, who we used to rely on, now are frailer and need us. That job is no longer where we go every day. That place we used to call home is not ours any more.

Death is always with us. And death always brings the possibility of new life. A new home. The softening of our hard edges, as parts of ourselves die. And so we read the names. We pray for our loved ones. And we look for signs of new life.

And the thing is, the more we practice these things, the more we come together and worship and read the names, the more we pray for our loved ones privately, the more we make their resurrection real. Our prayers, our remembering the names and speaking them and praying for our loved ones, our

prayers become over time more like a conversation with that person, that person who is gone in one way, but who we may start to see, is still here.

The more we practice, we may experience our prayers as more like praying with the person we have lost. We may come to see that we can finish that unfinished conversation, we can say that thing we never got to say, we can let go a little of the hurt over the thing that happened and the regret over what didn't happen. When we pray for those we have lost, we may be lucky enough to get them back, just a little bit.

Our prayers do not stop our grief and pain. But over time, our prayers can transform our grief, add into it other feelings, like gratitude. And when that happens, that is our resurrection.

We grieve because we love. And love never dies. It is always being reborn, transformed, made into something new.

Probably none of us know all the people named on the list in our bulletin. Some of us may not have known any of them. And still, it's important for us to pray to and for these people, even the ones we didn't know at all. It's important for us to pray to and for the many more in the communion of saints whose names we don't even know.

It's important to pray for them, for some of the same reasons we pray for those most dear to us who we have lost.

We pray for these saints we don't know, to feel more connected and less alone. We pray because they all had lives worth remembering. They all had lives and stories, they had joys and struggles that we gathered here can relate to. Their stories are now part of the bigger story, the story of all of us. Praying for them helps us place them, and ourselves, into that big, ever-changing story. A story, that like our love, can never die.

So we say the creed. We give our heart to God who is in a neverending dance with Godself, and with us. We affirm our belief in a love in Christ that never dies. We listen to the names. We hear their voices echoing in this room and we feel their prayers soaked into these walls. We go to the communion rail, and feel the presence beside us of Frank Griswold, and Polly Randall, and even St Martin himself, celebrating this Eucharist with us.

The saints are praying with us now. Their story is not over. Their story is continuing, in us. Amen.