

Sunday 1st November 2024

All Saints' Day

Gospel Reading

John 11.32-44

32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' 37 But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' 40 Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.']

Other Readings: Wisdom 3.1-9 or Isaiah 25.6-9

Psalm 24.1-6

Revelation 21.1-6a

Homily

One of the things that is particularly impressive about so many of our Greater Lincolnshire churches is the church yards. So many of our churches have a burial place nearby. Often very beautiful, increasingly sanctuaries for nature as well as resting-places for loved ones, our church yards provide an important opportunity for the bereaved to express their grief. To have 'a place to go', for many people, helps them to handle the reality of loss - and can, over time - become also a place of quiet hope. For some, the church yard becomes a garden, like the garden in which Jesus' body was laid, and therefore a place in which it is also possible to discover a sense of 'resurrection hope'. We might remember Jesus meeting with Mary Magdalene in the garden on the first Easter morning, and pray that our own departed

loved ones are now meeting with him in eternity - and that we in time might enjoy such a meeting ourselves.

This festival of All Saints, which is closely followed by another important day, All Souls, brings us into contact with life and death. Our gospel reading reminds us that Jesus was present at the saddest of times in the life of his friends and disciples - and that out of that deep sadness he was able to draw life and hope. Lazarus is dead. His family is distraught. Jesus comes, prays, and works a miracle - which many see as a kind of fore-taste of the miracle that will be his resurrection - which is the basis of all Christian hope.

The first disciples who were with Jesus during these few days were confused by him. Why didn't he rush to Mary and Martha? Why had he waited until he received the news of Lazarus' death before he came? Jesus' explanation points to God. Even at this point in his life and ministry he is wanting to focus attention away from himself personally, towards his Heavenly Father and the source of all life. There is huge compassion in Jesus' actions and attitude, and the deepest understanding of what it is to be human.

So as we gather on this festival of All Saints, and as we think, also, about All Souls, we are able to do so reminded of Jesus' love for all people, and of the mystery that is at the centre of his identity: that he brings light in darkness and hope out of loss.

At this time of year we will surely remember our own loved ones - those whose deaths may have been recent - those who passed away many years ago. We will remember them, and continue to place them into God's everlasting care.

Every life matters to Jesus. Yes, there are 'big saints', such as those after which our churches are often named: Peter, James, Mary, Anne. However, the promise of the gospel is for all people, and on this day of all days we surely remember not just the 'big saints' but those normal people, 'everyday saints', with whom we have spent the majority of our lives: our family, our friends, our neighbours - those who may be buried in our local church yard or whose ashes were scattered in the crematorium grounds. These are the people with whom we may have shared high days and holidays - Christmas, Easter, baptisms and weddings. God has been at work in their lives as he is at work in all lives - and it is right that they should be honoured and remembered - not just individually but as part of the 'cloud of witnesses' who have humbly sought to do their best, to love, to serve and to care. May they

rest in peace. May their sins be forgiven. May we remember them today and tomorrow, rejoicing in their company on this feast of All Saints and looking for their eternal rest at All Souls. And may we see to follow their example, and live our lives for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Conversation Questions

1. Is there an 'everyday saint' that you are thinking about especially this All Saints Day and about whom you might like to share something?
2. Is there a place about which you might like to tell us that is holy to you, and in which you feel close to those whom you love and who have died?
3. What do you feel about Jesus' response to Mary, Martha and Lazarus?
4. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
5. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Almighty God,
you have knit together your elect
in one communion and fellowship
in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord:
grant us grace so to follow your blessed saints
in all virtuous and godly living
that we may come to those inexpressible joys
that you have prepared for those who truly love you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*God of holiness,
your glory is proclaimed in every age:
as we rejoice in the faith of your saints,
inspire us to follow their example
with boldness and joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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