

Feast of All Souls 2016

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+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

'Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us'. (Romans 5.5)

'God shows God's love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'. (Romans 8.8)

'The faithful will abide with God in love'. (Wisdom 3.9)

On this All Soul's Day, this day given to us that we might voice our prayers to God for the dead, our readings are joined together with one common thread: Love. The love of God poured into us, the love of God gifted to us in the death of Christ, the love of God through which we abide with God

forever. Somehow, I think, we are meant to see our connection with the dead, our prayer to God for them, as an act of love—a sharing in this gift of God to us in Christ and by the Holy Spirit.

As we gather today many of us will have particular people on our hearts. Perhaps it is someone lost quite recently, for whom the blow of sorrow still hits hard. Others we remember maybe from some time ago, for whom time has nursed the wounds of our loss. But we remember them today, with fondness or regret, in sensitivity or frustration, or perhaps simply with numbness and clarity of mind. To simply dwell on these past lives, however, misses the point. This Requiem is not about them, it is *for* them. This is an act of love.

Death is perhaps the most 'regular', normal, and typical experience we can have. Death comes to us all. Death levels the playing field entirely, and unites us more than any other experience in life. In the midst of all our diversity, it is the one experience we

will most certainly share with every person. Death is not *natural* to us, we were made for life, but it is *normal* in that it happens to everyone and is inescapable.

This is one reason why the death of Christ is so central to our faith, why 'God shows God's love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ *died* for us'.

Had Christ become only a first-century Jewish male, an impoverished nomad or wandering teacher, or any other number of things we could say that in coming to us in Christ God united to himself certain aspects of human life, certain ways of being and acting, certain circumstances and experiences. But it is perhaps at the point of death on the cross that Christ identifies most centrally with us, as his humanity extends not only to aspects of his individuality, but all the way down to the depths of us, even to the point of that common, all-too-human experience of death.

God entering the bane commonality of human death, sets off something that lies at the centre of the paradoxical mystery of our faith: our *life*, our truest life, comes through *death*. In Christ, death becomes the source of life. Death becomes creative action.

When God in Christ enters human death—that universal experience we all will share—God's power, God's life, God's *love* enters that same universality: nothing and no one is able to escape it. So that just as death levels the playing field, so does God's love—it is a love that establishes complete equity.

The resurrection is not an afterthought to Christ's death to even the score after the tragedy of the cross. When perfect and unending life touches death, it has no choice but to come alive. God's love is creative, and in touching death it created new life.

'God shows God's love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'

The twentieth-century Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple said that we do not pray for the dead because we believe that God will otherwise neglect them, but because 'we claim the privilege of uniting our love for them with God's'.

So this day, the 'day of the dead' as it is often called, is about love. It is not *about* All Souls—those who have past—it is *for* them. So we offer the sacrifice of the mass, from which the life of the world flows, for all the departed, uniting our care for them with the perfect and unending love of God where hope does not disappoint.

May the souls of the faithful through the mercy of God abide forever with God in love.