

All Souls – Passing from death to life

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All Souls 2020 – Job 14.1-15, Ps 90, Jn 5.19-29

You remember the light of the Christ candle at last Sunday's baptism? It says that the resurrection of Jesus long ago is something we trust in so much that we pass its light on to our children. We look back through the lives of all our dead to the resurrection of Jesus, and that event transforms the meaning of those deaths from futility into hope. The baptismal candle says that resurrection is everyone's gift.

Because of the resurrection of Jesus too, we can also turn to look into the future and see our own deaths not as capricious ends, but with the hope that they are a part of the way to a joy which cannot be snatched away. Hope; belief. Are they enough? We want certainty, but we'll never be absolutely sure. And that's not a bad thing.

We're often tempted to assert something definite where we want to defy the sadness of loss; where we want to fight with God over the rights and wrongs of someone's death. But in the end, our faith doesn't deal in those certainties – doesn't centre on a God who can be manipulated into indulging us. And that's good; frustrating, but as it should be.

Job and the Psalmist speak realistically of the difficulties of being mortal. They're clear about death being a part of life. They don't pull any punches. They engage with God in very strong language, and ask the same 'why' questions that we ask. They know God has something to do with this.

What does our heritage offer us here? After worship in many churches, people will pray that the souls of the faithful

departed may rest in peace and rise in glory. There are plaques here and in churches around the world asking that we 'Pray for the Soul of ...'. Do we really expect things to change for the dead? Is that what all those plaques are calling for?

One way to think about it is to say that God, free from time's constraints, is able to be present to us, and at the same time, present to those Souls we are praying for.

I suppose that could mean that just as we pray for the souls of the faithful departed, in God's present, right now, our distant descendants might be praying for our souls. And while for them, we might be a plaque on a wall or in a churchyard somewhere, what they are praying in that distant future might, by God's grace, have some influence over the way we choose to live now. I wonder.

Jesus, in today's gospel, takes us deeper into this realm of fluid time, grace and choice, and so into the significance of such prayer. ²⁴ *Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.*

²⁵ *'Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.*

Present, past and future all dissolve into grace without time. Death dissolves into a greater reality of life which is an answer to a call – a call from we know not when – but a call which we might dare to ask might be uttered.

For our loved ones, for us, no certainty – but there's hope. For our loved ones, for us, no manipulating a system, but there's prayer.

Hope and prayer are not bad options in a real world.

So let's hope, and let's pray.

Amen

