

## All Souls Day + 2 November 2023 + Wis 3:1-9 + Rom 6:3-9 + Jn 6:37-40

There are some mysteries in life that, when faced with, it seems like the only appropriate word to speak is silence. We might think of the suffering of the innocent. Or debilitating diseases that seem to rob all the life out of a person. Above all, the separation of death. In fact, if death had the last word in all things, this life would be a long, bitter, cruel joke.

But thanks be to God death does not have the last word! The last word, because of the Cross of Christ, is one of triumph: *Alleluia!* We proclaim the Alleluia before the reading of the Gospel, and especially during Easter time, because since the very earliest days of the Church—the Church that came into being after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—*Alleluia* has been the one-word song of triumph of life over death. And it is fitting to proclaim before the Gospel, because the Gospel is, in a nutshell, the proclamation of resurrection: that Jesus Christ is Lord! And the crowning moment of His Lordship, the moment when all doubt was finally removed, was when He rose from the dead.

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus reveal His "mission statement", to use a modern term: *I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day.* Now recall that this proclamation occurred quite early in Jesus' public ministry, and so it wouldn't have made much of any sense to the original audience. But we have the blessing of hindsight: we know exactly what He is talking about. It was the Father's will that death should not have the last word in His creation, and so He sent His Son to make sure His will was carried out. And His Son Jesus delivered, big time!

So Jesus continues: *for this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day.* Near the commemoration of our faithful departed on the St. Joseph altar, there is a 14<sup>th</sup> century Icon that I think portrays well Jesus' words in our Gospel today. We see Adam and Eve, helpless in the grave, have their eyes fixed on Jesus, who is lifting them out and back into life. This is a fitting image for our earthly pilgrimage as well: if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can have confidence that He will raise us from the dead unto eternal life.

So what does all of this have to do with our commemoration of All the Faithful Departed? Well, simply put, we believe there is hope for them too, even beyond the grave. Our deceased loved ones who were marked in this life with the sign of faith through Baptism have not simply died; no, as our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading today from the Letter to the Romans says, they *have died with Christ*. And that makes all the difference in the world. *If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him*.

So strong is our faith in the resurrection that some may say, "then why do we need to pray for the faithful departed?" Well, just as we pray for our loved ones in this life, our prayers

do not cease when they have passed from this life. As the commendation prayer of the Funeral Mass says: *To you, O Lord, we commend the souls of your servants; in the sight of this world they are now dead; in your sight may they live forever.* The prayer continues (and this is our prayer today as well): *forgive whatever sins they committed through human weakness and in your goodness grant them everlasting peace.*

So yes, the blood of the Lamb can wash away any sin. But, to see heaven as something automatic trivializes the choices we make and ultimately relativizes evil. Our own innate sense of justice knows this cannot be the case. St. Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians, ch.3 (vv. 12-15), reminds us that there will be a judgment day, when all of a person's works will be tested *as through fire*. Reflecting on this passage, Pope Benedict XVI says, *the fire which both burns and saves is Christ himself, the Judge and Saviour. The encounter with him is the decisive act of judgment. Before his gaze all falsehood melts away. This encounter with him, as it burns us, transforms and frees us...Yet in the pain of this encounter, when the impurity and sickness of our lives become evident to us, there lies salvation. Christ's gaze, the touch of his heart heals us through an undeniably painful transformation "as through fire" (Spe Salvi 47).*

This purifying fire is what has been traditionally called the "pains" of Purgatory. And so we pray for the poor souls undergoing purification in Purgatory, just as we pray for any loved one who is undergoing purification in this life. But we do so always remembering that this is the "good" kind of pain, like the pain of woman in childbirth, the pain that is always necessary for new life. And we take comfort in knowing that the gaze of Christ may sting, but only because of the intensity of His love and mercy and holiness. And so full of hope in the resurrection of the dead, we pray, *eternal rest grant unto them o Lord, and let perpetual life shine upon them. May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace, Amen. Alleluia!*