

2 November – All Souls A – B – C

First reading Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food.

On this mountain he will remove the mourning veil covering all peoples, and the shroud enwrapping all nations, he will destroy Death for ever. The Lord will wipe away the tears from every cheek; he will take away his people's shame everywhere on earth, for the Lord has said so. That day, it will be said: See, this is our God in whom we hoped for salvation; the Lord is the one in whom we hoped. We exult and we rejoice that he has saved us.

Second reading Philippians 3:20-21

For us, our homeland is in heaven, and from heaven comes the saviour we are waiting for, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his glorious body. He will do that by the same power with which he can subdue the whole universe.

Gospel Luke 7:11-17

Jesus went to a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people.

When he was near the gate of the town it happened that a dead man was being carried out for burial, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople were with her. When the Lord saw her he felt sorry for her. "Do not cry" he said. Then he went up and put his hand on the bier and the bearers stood still, and he said, "Young man, I tell you to get up." And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Everyone was filled with awe and praised God saying, "A great prophet has appeared among us; God has visited his people." And this opinion of him spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside.

Meditation

A general commemoration of all the faithful departed was celebrated by the Churches of the East on the Saturday before Lent. In the eighth century a similar commemoration was found in many monasteries of the Western Church. In 998, St. Odilo of Cluny established November 2 as an annual commemoration of the dead in all the monasteries of the Cluniac federation. The celebration was spread by the new orders of the tenth- and eleventh-century Gregorian Reform. It was adopted at Rome in the fourteenth century. In these days all of nature speaks to us of harvest.

Crops are gathered into barns and our homes are decorated with the colourful fruits of the field and orchard. There is a singular beauty in this season which impels us to drive into the countryside to soak in its colour and texture. But the beauty of autumnal harvest is a terrible sort of beauty, for it is the beauty of death itself. In these days the Church celebrates the harvest of God's faithful.

On November 1 we focus our attention upon the glorious beauty of that harvest. We revel in that community of the holy which breaks through the barriers of time. We are at one in Christ with all those who have lived and died in the power of his name. Our focus today calls us back to the terrible sort of beauty that makes this harvest possible. Nothing is more sure than that all of us are born to die. We have to face death first quite often, when it strikes our beloved ones, and finally when we ourselves are involved. We have to leave everything behind us. We may try not to think of it. Some consider death as an absurdity. Others learn to handle this reality as an integral part of our condition. Am I, who came into being and grew into a person through my relationship with fellowmen, doomed to break for always the very ties that made me the person I am?

Am I, who believe that God called me to live with him in a sacred partnership (covenant), rewarded with mere nothingness the moment I breathe my last? We Christians are aware in faith that beyond death we will be with God. Our completion as human beings comes only in that full and final choice for God which is possible in death. Were it not for Christ, we would come together in despair. Christ, however, has shared our fear of entering a gateway whose other side we can not know. In him we have a glimpse of the completion which awaits us. Because of him we can celebrate the deaths of those who are responsible for our lives. Because of him we perceive the beauty of a dying which will bring us into God's harvest. Yet we are also aware that at the moment of death, we are not always the kind of persons we should be for all eternity; hence, that a process of purification follows death before we will share life with God, as promised. On this awareness Christians base their ancient custom of praying for the deceased, that God may grant them the vision of his glory. All Souls Day is a special day of prayer for all our brothers and sisters who have gone ahead of us.