

Remembrance Sunday 2019 SSP

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Let me begin by thanking Maestro Busby and our choir for this beautiful Requiem Mass. The texts for the Requiem really preach the Word for me today, but I do want to say a few things.

I have long thought the Church needs a Sunday devoted to the Requiem the week after we celebrate All Saints Sunday, for All Souls, as this is properly named, is an extension of All Saints. Whereas All Saints celebrates the triumphs of Jesus Christ in his servants (such as the recently canonized Saint John Henry Newman) as well as the calling to which every one of us disciples of Jesus is summoned, All Souls extends the mercy and grace, yes the triumph, of Christ to everyone who will. In the words of the priest and poet John Donne, “Salvation to all that will is nigh!” Having such a Mass on a Sunday, calling it Remembrance or All Souls Sunday, is a marvelous teaching instrument about one of the central mysteries of the faith – that is the relationship of our death to our Lord.

Today briefly I want to ask, where are the dead, and why do we pray for them?

The dead are in two places that are really one. The dead whom we have known and cherished, or known and not cherished or even hated (!) are in our hearts. And all the dead, we may call them the departed, whether we have known them or not, are in the hands of Almighty God, whom we know as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore we also know God is Love Almighty.

We hold the dead in our minds and hearts and thereby have a relationship with them. And here we may, in that relationship, pray for them and for ourselves, because that relationship has a bearing on life everlasting. So we pray for many things, for peace and rest, for healing and

understanding, for justice and mercy, for forgiveness and grace. But all of these things are functions of the fact that what we are really praying for is that the good work of Jesus Christ, who gave his life for the life of the world, will be brought to fulfillment and completion in all the souls of the departed.

My much beloved father-in-law, as he was near his death some years ago, sat up alertly from what I thought had been sleep, and said, “Andrew, will we meet foes in heaven?” I thought, is he thinking of his days in World War II, or of a more personal enemy? But I realized it didn’t matter, as I said, “Yes, Sam, I believe so. But it’s ok, because heaven belongs to Jesus. It’s his homeland. And he has a great way of making foes into friends.” Sam thought, and nodded, and closed his eyes again.

This is not praying for a second chance. We have our life to live and it is not a dress rehearsal. We pray that God will bring whatever grace there is in a life to its completion. And this is not an assumption that everyone is heavenward bound no matter what, for that would make a mockery of the highest gift of human dignity, our free will. No one is forced to love God, or to love at all for that matter. That is why the Requiem texts have a severity about them, but they are really, if you look closely, severely merciful: “What shall I, frail man, be pleading? Who for me be interceding, when the just are mercy needing?” It is all the mercy of God as extended to the uttermost (which is what I must have if I am to be there!) for our salvation.

Let me finish with an old funeral prayer from the Book of Common Prayer which says it all. “Into thy hands, O Lord, we commend thy servant *N.*, *our dear brother/sister*, as into the hands of a faithful Creator and most merciful Savior, beseeching thee that *he* may be precious in thy sight. Wash *him*, we pray thee, in the blood of that immaculate Lamb that was slain to take away the sins of the world: that, whatsoever defilements *he* may have contracted in the midst of

this earthly life being purged and done away, *he* may be presented pure and without spot before thee; through the merits of Jesus Christ thine only Son our Lord. Amen.” (BCP, p. 488)

And what then? To stick with John Donne: “From the round world’s imagined corners, blow your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise from death, you numberless infinities of souls, and to your scattered bodies go.” As I once heard a great African American preacher proclaim, it is that “great getting-up Day” of the Resurrection and the Life Everlasting.

So to that end, dear fellow disciples, let us do the good work of prayer for the departed, and pray that we ourselves will be there with them.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.