

**All Souls' Requiem  
Phil 2.1-4; Lk 14.12-14  
2 November 2008.**

**Some words from the Eucharistic Prayer: '...although death comes to us all, yet we rejoice in the promise of eternal life...'**

**We do not have to live for very long on this earth before our existence is stained by bereavement and loss. So All Souls' Day is a practical recognition of this simple fact of life.**

**Its origin is interesting, but let me start to tell you about it by referring to All Saints' Day. From earliest times it has been the habit to commemorate holy men and women, usually on the anniversary of their death. This began as a result of persecution and the consequent veneration of those who had suffered martyrdom, and All Saints' Day has been celebrated at least since the Fourth Century of the Christian era.**

**The commemoration of all souls, those men and women who are not identified as actual saints, came much later but it too is a natural thing to do. After all, bereavement is (as I have at least implied) is an experience common to us all. Its all-embracing reality in no way reduces the pain it inflicts. Very naturally it makes us want to pray for the person whom we love and have lost. That is such a fundamentally natural thing for a believer to do that the thought that one should not do it strikes me as utterly alien to human nature, and the theological argument that tries to enforce it is, to my mind, repugnant.**

**But, that being so, what do we think is going on when we pray for the departed? Can we alter their status, so to speak, as they await the judgement of god at the termination of their earthly life? I do not know, but I do know that instinctively I pray for those**

whom I love, dead or alive... and I dare to hope that someone might pray for me after I have died.

The ancient phrase that we traditionally use is a comfort here, 'May the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace and rise in glory.' It underpins our prayer, and so it should, but there are connotations that we can draw out. First, is the concept of gratitude. We are thankful for the person concerned and we want to tell God that. Thankful for all that has been good, and fine and loveable in them and their life. Second, we give thanks that the Christian faith teaches us that life is not over at death. We give thanks to God for that doctrine, too. Beyond the grave there is hope. Christian hope. Here we are using the word 'hope' in a strong and specific sense, not in the more usual way of wishing (hoping), that we do not run out of petrol before getting home, or hoping (wishing) that the housekeeping bill may not continue rise inexorably. No, that will not do. Hope in the Christian meaning of

the word is the acceptance of the promise of Jesus that there is a resurrection and a life to come; that we are not snuffed out like candles when this life ends.

As I have already said, the basis of our hope is the Lord Jesus. First, his own experience and the reality of his life, teaching, death and resurrection. This powerful assurance, reassurance if you prefer, is a drum-beat of the New Testament and sounds throughout Christian history. Second comes the witness of the saints, whom we also commemorate at this time of the year. Their lives and examples provide us with inspiration to persevere in following Jesus. It is possible to have the courage to bet your life, very literally, on the truth of the gospel and to know that it will be a winning bet. From the disciples to men and women who have died in our own generation, there is the inspiration that relates very directly to our own ordinariness and to our own discipleship (should that demand be made of us).

**All this relates to the very natural desire to remember those whom we have known and loved or respected. It may be that, of all the Christian festivals and commemorations, this one strikes the strongest chord with our very humanity. That is why we are here, for our humanity is fulfilled in Jesus whose kingdom is not simply of this world but is eternal and glorious; here and now; this life and the life to come; for ever and ever. Amen.**