

All Souls November 2020

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Amen.

When Big Ben struck midnight on the 31 December 2019, in our street we did, what has become a tradition, of doing the conga down the street banging saucepans with wooden spoons the climax of an evening of neighbourly get together, dancing and drinking as we were seeing the old year out and welcoming the new year in. Who would've known that just three months later we would've been almost under house arrest as the world began to change as a result of COVID-19.

And what a year to date it has been. For me personally it's been a tough year, it's the year when I became an orphan. In May my stepmother went to bed and never woke up she suffered a huge brain hemorrhage. Due to COVID-19, I was not able to travel to Spain to comfort my father, and so, to me, it was not surprising, when I then got a call to say that my father had hung himself on the tree, that we used to jokingly call the hangman's tree, outside their Finca in Spain early in the morning as the Sun was rising and the dawn was heralding promise of a new day. It turns out he couldn't cope with the loss of my stepmother, the fact that he was 80 and isolated in a foreign country, although he had lived there for 40 years, it's at times of testing that you need your family around you.

In my street, another neighbour has lost both her mother and father this year, again, not from COVID, and another neighbour has lost his sister who couldn't get the cancer treatment she needed because of the virus restrictions, and, finally in our street of just 18 houses, a marriage has broken up and the parents have separated, the strain of living on top of each other for so long during lockdown was cited as the reason they have given for the split.

In the Church year, November is a month for remembering and reflecting and this evening, we come, possibly with some trepidation, to remember quietly those whom we have loved and those who we have lost.

It isn't easy to remember, when remembering brings back the pain of our loss. It isn't easy to remember when the relationship we shared had its difficulties or when we feel that there were things we wanted to do or say but didn't get the chance. Sometimes remembering is the last thing that we want to do or are able to do...

So, don't underestimate the courage it has taken to come here this evening, to gather with others who have experienced loss, to remember and honour our loved ones in whatever way feels appropriate for us at this time.

In my street, not one of us who did that conga down the road on New Year's Eve could have dreamt that we would be where we are today, not "just

another year” and this is one street, I wonder what has been happening in your street with your family, with your neighbours with your friends, sometimes it can be hard not knowing what the future holds but that’s where we can get reassurance and comfort, through Our Christian Faith.

In our Gospel reading Jesus reassures us of the promise of eternal life he says

“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, **but raise them up at the last day.** For my Father’s will is that everyone who **looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.**”

What does eternal life mean?

Eternal life means good news, it means that those whom we have loved and lost have defeated death and the grave. They stand, today with our Lord Jesus Christ, whose resurrection gives us the promise of our own resurrection. They are not merely “in a better place,” they are in the best place, freed from all suffering, all sorrow, all pain, and all mourning – standing in the very presence of the living God.

It is not God’s will that anyone should perish. Jesus offers eternal life to everyone – though people are certainly free to refuse it, I like to think that when those I have lost come to the gates of heaven and are offered entry, that they will accept it with open arms.

The Christian faith has a strong tradition of remembering. As Jesus approached his own death, we’re told that he shared a simple meal with his friends. He urged them to remember him every time they broke bread or drank together.

I know that for many of us there will be times of day or simple acts that remind us of the person we have lost – it may be as we close the curtains at the end of the day or boil the kettle to make a cup of tea. Sometimes the act of remembering will trip us up as we seem to forget what has happened, at other times the act of remembering is our greatest comfort and strength. I enjoy doing jigsaw puzzles, they take me away from the busyness of my day, and when we lose someone dear to us, it’s as though a jigsaw puzzle we have almost completed has been thrown up into the air and all the pieces have been scattered far and wide.

As we begin to remember the things that made us laugh and the things that made us cross, the things that made us proud and the ways they could embarrass us, it’s as though the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are coming back together again...

It can vary from person to person, and for some of us it may take many years to reach beyond the “aching sense of loss” but every time we remember we

gather some of the fragments together and the new picture starts to get clearer...and we can have hope, living hope,

Peter writes: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into **a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**

It takes courage to remember. The words you use to remember, to describe your memories, and loss will be different to mine. But I hope we can all come to share together a strong Christian Faith:

- A faith that death has not defeated for those we have lost,
- A faith that death will not defeat us either. Amen.