

# The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for The Thirty Second Sunday of Ordinary Time  
(Year C)  
6<sup>th</sup> November 2022

*'Now he is God, not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all men are in fact alive.'*

With these words Jesus silences the Sadducees, in response to their ridiculous attempt to trap him. God is a god of life, the God of the living. The division of the world into people who are living and those who are dead is to completely misunderstand the nature of God, and the nature of human life. To God the division does not exist, there is no death in God.

This is why, as Christians, it is for us both a duty and a joy to pray for those who have gone before us. *'In the eyes of the unwise they did appear to die..'* as the Book of Wisdom tells us, *'but their hope was rich with immortality...'* Pope Benedict wrote about this with great simplicity in his magnificent letter on hope, *Spe Salvi*. He reminds us that *'the belief that love can reach into the afterlife'* is fundamental to Christian faith. To God all people are alive, and so the affection we feel for our departed, and the love that we show them in our prayer for them, are as important as any other prayer we offer.

Pope Benedict reminds us:

*'We should recall that no man is an island, entire of itself. Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do and achieve. And conversely, my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse.'*

As the people I have known pass through the time of purification that helps them to be ready to enter God's presence, my prayer can help them. The time I decide to give up, to take out of my day to spend in praying for them; the fact that I choose to call them to mind in God's presence, these simple actions are counted to their credit and help them to be that bit more ready to enter the presence of the one who is life. *'It is never too late to touch the heart of another, nor is it ever in vain'* Pope Benedict tells us. He goes on: *'As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking: how can I save myself? We should also ask: what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise? Then I will have done my utmost for my own personal salvation as well.'*

It is a great thing to know that my life is not cut off and separated from the lives of those that have gone before me. For those that were close to me, as well as for those who I never met, there is an unbreakable connection, a link between my life and theirs. My prayers for them make a real difference, just as their prayers for me do. I want them to get to Heaven, just as I want to get their myself. I know they were not perfect, of course, and so at the time of their death they were far from ready to stand, heads held high in the presence of the one who is all love, all gift, all generosity; but I do also know that the fact I give some of my time, however little, to visiting their graves, to praying for them, to having Masses said for them will help them raise their heads a little more until one day they will have left behind them all that stands between them and God,

and they can dare to look on him face to face, and their perfection will be complete and they will be fully, completely and unambiguously 'with' him.

The Preface we use at funeral masses reminds us that in death life is changed, not ended. Those who have gone before us, although we may not have seen them for many years, do not belong to the past, they belong to God's present. They are alive in God, and so they are every bit as alive as I am.

These scripture readings are very timely, in the month of November, because they remind us that the need of those who have gone before us is great, and the means of supplying that need lies in our hands. We are cut off from the sight of them, but our lives are every bit as much entwined as they ever were. This month challenges us on several fronts.

Do I long for Heaven? Is my longing for Heaven the guiding principle that helps me decide the person that I want to be?

Do I want to play my part in bringing other people to Heaven, fulfilling the longing that is written into the heart of every human being?

Have I allowed the busy-ness and the urgency of daily life to make me forget those who have gone before me?

Have I mistakenly thought that we are each responsible for our own salvation, forgetting that we each have a part to play in helping one another find our way to God's presence?

There is work for us to do: work on our own behalf, work for one another, work for those who have gone ahead of us, the work of prayer – but it is a joyful task.

A Prayer of John Donne:

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven, to enter into that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but one equal music; no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession; no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity: in the habitations of thy majesty and glory, world without end.

Amen.