

We're celebrating All Saints' Day today, a great festival in our lecture. It's one of the distinctive characteristics of All Saints' Day is that it has a past present and future dimension to it. All Saints' Day falls in this time of year, which is full of remembering. Next Sunday in church, we're actually following the English custom of having Remembrance Sunday. Then of course, there's Veterans Day coming up soon when we honor those who've served in the military. This week also saw All Souls' Day, Día de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead. Both days marked for remembering those who've gone before us and All Saints' Day has that element of remembrance. We give thanks particularly for all those who've played a part in our faith journeys, who've shaped us, who've had an input into our lives in that regard. And in passing, let me have a word here about grandparents, because I was in a group recently and just as a kind of icebreaker, we told something about how we first came to faith and important people in our journey of faith.

And I was amazed at three quarters of the people in the group listed grandparents as the most significant spiritual influence on their lives. So I just mentioned that because to all the grandparents watching that you have an important role to play in your grandchildren's lives. And having said that it would make sense that as we remember those who have shaped us, many of us today are remembering our own grandparents and others who introduced us to the faith when we were young, maybe family friends, or Sunday school teachers. And such remembrances are inevitably tinged with sadness. Losing those we love and care for is a painful process. Such pain is very present in our gospel reading, it's full of tears. Mary, the brother of Lazarus is weeping. The Jews with Mary are weeping and Jesus himself was weeping. "Jesus wept," famously the shortest verse in the Bible and also perhaps one of the most profound.

Jesus himself was moved to tears at the loss of his friend Lazarus. In Greek, what's translated in this passage as "deeply moved", is actually the sound of a horse snorting. We could assume that Jesus was

taken over by such deep emotion, that he let out an involuntary groan from the depths of his heart. Jesus knew the pain of losing a loved one and Jesus is here living out his teaching from the beatitudes that we are to mourn with those who mourn. The call on us is not to cheer up those who mourn, but to weep with those who weep. And the shedding of tears is a way for the body to get rid of unhealthy toxins that build up as a result of stress and tears are a natural soporific. They act as a tranquilizer to the body, which is why we could often feel so tired after a good cry. And it's strange therefore that people will always feel the need to apologize for crying.

We're not to be afraid to cry. We shouldn't be afraid of sitting with someone who is crying and allowing them to cry. And of course, our Revelation reading, the epistle that we had read also makes reference to tears. John presents a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, and he writes of the promise that God will be with his people and that he will wipe every tear from their eyes. The reason we can enter into the pain of death, both when we experience it and in the experience of others, we can go there because we know that death is not the last word. Jesus wept with Martha and Mary, even though he could and would restore Lazarus to life. He wept with them because he truly felt their pain. We live in a death denying culture that shies away from the reality of death at every opportunity.

There's a poem that's sometimes read at funerals which always makes me squirm. It includes the line, "Death is nothing at all." Nonsense. The grief of losing someone can be overwhelming. We don't have to pretend otherwise as we know that because of what Jesus has done for us, death is swallowed up in victory. We live as a people of hope knowing that one day God will wipe away all tears. In the book of Ephesians, Paul prays that his readers will have the eyes of their hearts enlightened, that they may know the hope to which he has called them the riches of the glorious inheritance of the saints.

We are a people of hope, unlike a boy called Billy whose cat was run over by a car. His mother quickly disposed of the remains before four-year-old Billy had a real sense of what was happening. But a few days later, he said to his mother, "Mum, where's the cat?" And his mother steeled herself and said, "Billy, the cat's died and has gone to be with God in heaven." And Billy said, "Well, what on earth would God want one with a dead cat?" Our hope is that death is not the last word, rather it is a portal to a new and more glorious resurrection life, a life enjoyed by all the saints who have gone before us and who now form a great cloud of witnesses, which surrounds us.

So I've addressed the element of the past in All Saints' Day and talked too about the glorious future that awaits God's saints. And as I've said, All Saints' Day also a message for the present. We need to be aware that we are numbered among the saints. When St. Paul begins his letters by saying grace and peace to all the saints in Colossae or wherever. He's not saying grace and peace to the leaders or grace and peace to the special holy ones, he means grace and peace to everybody, to all the saints in the church. So All Saints' Day is a day when we are numbered amongst the group that are being remembered.

The best definition of a saint I heard was by a little girl who was visiting a cathedral. And when she was with her mother and they were looking at the stained glass, and the girl asked, "Who are all the people in the windows?" And her mother said, "Well, they're the saints." So, the girl said, "Ah, so the saints are the people who let the light shine through." That's spot on. The saints are the people that let God's light, that light of the Holy Spirit, which is given to us, the saints are those who let that light shine through, shine out. We are the people from whom God's light shines.

I met someone last week who's light dazzled me. I was on a Cursillo weekend, which I always enjoy and at the end of the weekend, we were sharing the peace. And I greeted a chap who I know a bit, we don't see him very often on the weekends

because he's so busy doing all the logistics behind the scenes. But as I greeted him in the peace, I felt overwhelmed with a sense of the presence of God. And at the time I thought, "Well, that's a bit weird," and moved on. But after writing this sermon, I now realize what was happening, that the light of Christ was shining out of this saint who I was greeting. We are the saints of God called to be Christ light in the world. We are the people called to pass on that light. We are the ones that future generations will be remembering as being an influence on them. We are the ones that we hope in some future years, people will be remembering us on All Saints' Day. On this All-Saints' Day, let's resolve to live up to that great calling. Amen.