

All Souls Day 2019

November 2, 2019 (**Maurice Duruflé** Requiem–Magnum Chorum)

Readings: Wisdom 3:1-9; Romans 5:5-11; Luke 7:11-17

Most of us hope to be remembered for the good that we did in this life, rather than our shortcomings. It is only natural to desire to love and be loved. But when fallen human nature comes into play, too often we want to be remembered for our own self-satisfaction. It is a real blow to the ego to think that we may be forgotten. This could never happen to us, right? What do these names they have in common?

Dennis Ledon, Thomas Gibbons, Patrick Heffron, Francis Schenk

All served as rectors of the Cathedral of St. Paul. I have no illusions of grandeur.

George Clinton The Fourth Vice President

Hannibal Hamlin The Fifteenth Vice President

John Nance Garner The Thirty-Second Vice President

Alben W. Barkley The Thirty-Fifth Vice President ¹

Each was a former Vice- President of the United States of America, one heartbeat away from the presidency. Most have been long since forgotten. In an era in which politics is omnipresent, this may well serve as a dose of reality thrown into the mix. We are here this evening with an eye not to Washington D.C., but towards heaven. Here is the news flash–when our earthly lives end, the world will continue on with hardly a notice.² When death comes to a loved one, our grief is real, deep and profound. The Catholic perspective on death, judgment and memory is aimed both at fostering a more abiding faith for us and profiting our beloved dead.

The account of the widow at Nain is as poignant as any in the Scriptures. Every instinct of a parent is to protect her child. In Jewish society of the time, for a woman to be without a son meant that she was without any male agency; her future might well indeed be grim. Yet, it is at least implied that Jesus bypassed the laws of ritual purity forbidding one to

¹ Served under Thomas Jefferson from 1805-1809 & James Madison from 1809-1812; Served under Abraham Lincoln from 1861-1865; Served under Franklin D. Roosevelt from 1933-1941; Served under Harry S. Truman from 1949-1953.

² In the USA, 5 people die per minute, 7,708 per day, 2,813,503 per year.

touch a corpse; he went up and touched the coffin, and *he gave him back to his mother*. This miracle elicits from those standing by both fear and awe.

“A great prophet has arisen in our midst,” and “God has visited his people.” For the Christian, it is of the core of our faith that Jesus Christ triumphed over sin and death. As Catholics, we believe that our prayers for the dead matter before God. The ties that unite us during life do not disappear with bodily death. Rather, our prayers unite us with them.

Saint Thomas Aquinas taught: “Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others...We must therefore believe that there exists a communion of goods in the Church. But the most important member is Christ, since he is the head...therefore, the riches of Christ are communicated to all the members, through the sacraments.”³

Our prayer of faith is capable of helping the souls in purgatory, those who are counted among the saved but are yet being purified of all attachment to sin before experiencing heaven. “All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.”⁴

The world may forget us after we die, but shame on us if we forget our loved ones. We priests are comforted to know when others are praying for us, such as when we receive cards on our anniversary of ordination. How much more valuable will the prayers of the faithful be when offered for us upon our death? And how many souls tonight have no one to pray for them? Our prayers are for all the forgotten tonight.

Tonight's feast is about faith and hope, not despair. It concerns eternal life, even as it calls us to reflect upon our own mortality. There is one line in the liturgy for All Soul's Day that too often is overlooked.

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. # 947, cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum*, 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, paragraph 1030.

Written as a Sequence for the funeral Liturgy *Dies Irae*, is attributed to Thomas of Celano, the friend and biographer of St. Francis of Assisi. The new funeral rite omits a Sequence, though it could be sung as a hymn. It also appears in the Liturgy of the Hours in its original Latin. We heard it as a prelude tonight: *Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem*. “Loyal, affectionate, tender, devoted Lord Jesus, grant them rest.” It’s the only line from the *Dies Irae* that survived in Durufle’s *Requiem*.

These are just some of the words employed to translate this Latin phrase. *Pie* is in the seldom-used *vocative* case of the word *pius*.⁵ It is the case used when someone is directly calling out to another. We can think of the English word “evoke.” Thus, we say—O merciful, O tender Jesus. It almost defies translation, so rich is it in meaning. Still, we cannot escape judgment, no matter how much we try. Our faith beckons us to face the primordial human reality of the brevity and fragility of life.

When put to music, the evocative melody itself serves as an invitation to meditate on God’s mercy. How can we listen to the melodies of Durufle’s *Requiem* and not also reflect upon our own lives, and yes, our own death? He composed this requiem following the death of his father in 1947. This is my first All Souls’ Day since the death of my own father.

This composition compels us to stand in awe before God, who is our judge, loving and just. It is a feast all about the triumph of the blood of Jesus Christ, even as it recalls painful sad days of our past when we bid a tearful farewell to a loved one.

This brief meditation upon death and rest is useful and meritorious should it spur us onto greater works of charity for our brothers and sisters. May it lead us to a greater realization of the need to seek God’s mercy and recognize God’s tremendous love for us.

⁵ *pius*, *pia* *pium*; *piissimus* -a -um ADJ conscientious; upright; faithful; patriotic/dutiful, respectful; righteous; good; affectionate, tender, devoted, loyal (to family); pious, devout; holy, godly