

## **Homily**

### **All Souls' Day - C**

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November 02, 2025

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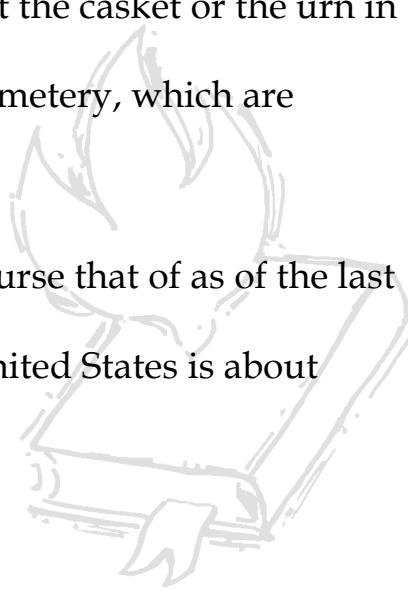
Isaiah 25: 6, 7-9Psalm 23

Romans 6: 3-9

John 11: 17-27

So if you look at the lists of those funerals we have celebrated at St. Anne's Church and St. Patrick's Church over the last twelve months, you will notice that that list keeps getting smaller and smaller. That is because fewer people are having these funeral services take place in churches for all kinds of different reasons. Maybe the children and the grandchildren are not churchgoing people and they would feel uncomfortable having services that way. Maybe they feel somewhat hypocritical to celebrate a Mass to honor a loved one in life when they do not practice the faith. Sometimes they find it cheaper to have all the services conducted at a funeral home than to put the casket or the urn in a car, drive it to the church and drive it to the cemetery, which are added expenses to pay.

I teach the students in my Death & Dying Course that of as of the last few years, the average cost of a funeral in the United States is about



\$9,000 (that is a lot of \$\$\$!). When I planned my own funeral arrangements way back when in 2000, that cost was at \$6,000 and it was much more affordable at that time.

So concerning funeral costs, sometimes we want to cut corners, sometimes we just want to have something convenient for everybody by holding everything in the funeral home. Sometimes we do not want to be a hypocrite and have services in church that we don't practice.

With all these practices, though, I think that people focus on the human elements of a funeral, those human things that we attach to the secular world because the secular world conditions us to think that it is okay to live in this particular way, rather than focusing on what God wants us to do and the whole purpose of having a funeral service here in the church.

Essentially, what I teach my students is that a funeral service is meant for the deceased to be connected in the Paschal Mystery of our Lord, held in our Lord's house. Celebrating a funeral vigil, Mass and committal at the cemetery gives the bereaved a consolation of hope that Jesus' victory over sin and death on the cross connects with their own

life, and that by Jesus dying for us and us connecting our lives to Christ, we get through this life into the next one. This also allows us to pray with God to guide our beloved deceased into the direction of heaven, where there will be no more tears, sadness or crying, just an everlasting peace with the one who created us and the one who wishes to bring us home.

The last sentence we pray during the Nicene Creed are important to me in reference to our beloved deceased: "I believe in the resurrection of the dead and of the life of the world to come. Amen.." The whole purpose of offering these funeral services inside of a church, God's house which has been consecrated for these particular services for this purpose, is for us to connect the person who died with the life of Christ himself.

There is a custom in many places around the world and even here over the last few months at St. Patrick is and St. Anne's, that people will come to these services and pray the rosary beforehand, carrying that person's life up into the arms of God. "*Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*" We realize that without

God, we are dust and unto dust we shall return with God *but with God*, we have a chance for everlasting life. The struggle in our lives is that many people do not think about God's life and God's world and God's purpose for dying on the cross.

In fact, in a Catholic church, you will notice that a crucifix has the corpus on top of a cross because we connect the person's life with Jesus crucified, with Christ crucified, that Jesus was willing to die to pay the price for the sins that we have committed on earth. By celebrating a funeral Mass in Church, we have a chance to get to the other side. A Protestant church would not have that corpus on this cross because their faith tradition focuses more on the resurrection but, as Catholics, in order to get to the other side, we have to pass through that purifying fire; we have to pass through the cross. We have to connect the life of the beloved deceased to the life of Christ which is what the funeral prayers are trying to do.

Just as importantly at funeral services in Church, we are celebrating a liturgy where the communion of saints join us in prayer, which is what happens every time we celebrate a sacrament inside this church or any

church. We ask the communion of saints to join us especially at a funeral service to help carry this person into the hands of God who will carry this person into heaven. If we do that, then this person has a chance for eternal life.

As we all know, focusing on God is not a great concern for the majority of our population, even those in the Catholic faith. Too many people are concerned about the things on earth rather than the things in heaven. Sometimes we forget that the whole purpose of a funeral liturgy in church to show God that we care about this person and wish to connect that person to Christ's life in god's house and then to ask God to carry us into heaven because we ca not make it there on our own. If we do not, then we parallel the story of the five unprepared virgins who knock on God's door, pleading, "Lord, open the door for us !" to which God replies, "Amen. It is as if I never knew you."

What I often do prior to a funeral service is ask families to tell me stories of the beloved deceased so I can try to connect those personal experiences with the gospel message to make that gospel come alive in the life of the person who has died. So during these funeral services, as I

explain these signs, these symbols, these rituals, as I explain that the purpose of the funeral is to connect the person is life to Christ crucified, to hold onto God, so God could carry us into heaven, I then conclude every funeral liturgy with a hymn that is sung by so many ordained and religious alike before we go to bed at night, a hymn that is sung while we are celebrating funerals of dignitaries in the church. The song is called the "*Salve Regina*," the *Hail Holy Queen*, which I would like to offer on behalf of all of our beloved deceased in Latin.

Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiæ,  
vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve  
Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevæ  
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes  
in hac lacrimarum valle.

Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos  
misericordes oculos ad nos converte;  
Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,  
nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.  
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.  
May the souls of all the faithful departed,  
through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

This is our prayer.

