

Homily All Souls Day 2022 Douai

Following the Solemnity of All Saints, from within the memory of those who preceded us in this life, today's commemoration of the dead is perhaps the oldest memory celebrated that we know of. Ever since the need was felt to 're-member', to give a witness to those who had died, and who, thereby, are no longer part of the world, it had been important to say that they had really lived. So human beings ritualised form around death, then burial, having separated the space that is the grave: So the signs began; a stone, as a tree to remember the one who had died, as if signs gave testimony to inform a mentality with which to discuss death, dying and the dead, while telling something about those who lived. It is no different today in the quirks of any cemetery.

This draws attention to the fact that the human being is a *homo liturgicus*, since ritual is existentially attached to the acting out of the human expression, aware of time, of life. He recognises death, by letting himself be questioned about death, living in the awareness that death is before us as the end of our earthly life.

In this, we are within the chain of generations, because others have given us life, others have brought us into the world, others have left us a world they built and developed. None of us is self-made. Since none of us is the first man, we have looked to both Adams, since we cannot fulfil ourselves, ultimately. Everything we benefit from has been prepared by others who have preceded us, and what we have lived and loved has always been lived and loved in the context of others. We remember with gratitude, not 'instrumentalising' the Eucharistic celebration. Rather, the Mass is the perfect sacrifice of praise that awakens the hope affection motivates, since, following faith, hope is intrinsic to God. Love must always know how to live in the present, but also know how to live with the past.

During the Roman years, it was always a curiosity to witness the concentration of crowds at the cemetery at Campo Verano, around 2 November. Similarly, students from the deep south of Italy would protest to me that it was '*impossibile*' that classes be held on the afternoon of the Commemoration of All Souls. Instead, they stay the extra day at home and converge on cemeteries in their towns and villages, accompanied by their families and friends, to visit the graves of their loved ones. Knowledge of what their departed relatives had enjoyed in this life would influence the luxuries they brought with them, so to lift the spirits of the dead on this day, whatever about their own.

Neo-pagan 'inculturation' of libations offered to ancient gods, alongside established Christian devotion, develop into recognisable liturgy. So, linked 'arm in arm', they stroll around cemeteries with their families and friends, wielding an ice-cream cone in one hand, and a fag in the other!

However human and emotionally compelling, it remains true that we Christians also have another reason for our making memorial. We profess to believe in communion; a communion that goes beyond death, a communion of an inheritance that is shared. Certainly each of us, today, thinks of loved ones who have died, but we should also think in a greater and broader communion of many people to whom we have a debt,

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people whom we may not even have noticed, but who have constituted for us a reason for living, and who have edified us day after day. The presence of crosses in our cemetery with people's names we never knew, intermingled with those we consciously remember, draws our attention to this.

Jesus reassures us: **"This is my Father's will, that I do not lose any of what he has given me, but resurrect him on the last day"**. The pledge of the Eucharistic celebration, its meal for the living and the dead, is for us, even in this life, and for the life to come, Christ's love in our hearts; a love that we desire for all those who have left us and who have died. In the love who is God, rather than eternal severance, communion will be eternal life.

It is in this sure and certain hope that the ritual practices of this day give us heart, in the relationships perfected by communion with the dead. We call on the God of the living and the dead, the creator and redeemer of the faithful, since, as St Augustine explained: *Those we love and lost are no longer where they were, but they are wherever we are*" So, it is, then, we confess Christ. Our prayers and supplications unite us while the resurrected Christ, for eternal life, makes us one body.