

All Souls

We have just entered a season of remembrance in the Church's year. Yesterday was the feast of All Saints, when we remember the many unnamed holy men and women of the past, though our city centre churches, along with very many others, will be celebrating that festival this coming Sunday. Then the following Sunday we commemorate Remembrance Sunday, when we remember with thanksgiving those who gave their lives in war for the cause of peace and justice. Remembrance Day this year will of course be particularly poignant. Not only does it fall on a Sunday but it also marks the centenary of the end of World War One, the war to end all wars as was hoped at the time. Sadly that was not to be.

Today is the feast of All Souls when we remember with affection and gratitude departed loved ones. And shortly we will have the opportunity to remember individual loved ones by name and to place a candle on the altar.

This is particularly appropriate to do in this church dedicated to peace and reconciliation, and to healing the wounds of history. For even within families and relationships there may be past wounds that still need to be healed. Sadness at the loss of a loved one can often be tinged with a sense of regret – regret as to what more we could have done for them, regret at issues that may not have been resolved. All we can do is lay these before God who alone knows the secrets of our hearts.

Our Bible reading just now (Romans 5,5-11) is one of those appointed for All Souls Day. And it is significant that in this passage St Paul stresses the importance of reconciliation, and above all reconciliation to God. For it is God who took the initiative to reconcile himself to fallen humanity, to all of us.

At the centre of God's plan of reconciliation is a death – the death of his Son Jesus Christ on a cross. In that great act God shares in the pain and suffering of our human condition. And yet our Lord's passion shows us that death is not the end, but rather a new beginning. Through the cross sin and death were overcome.

For that reason St Paul can talk about hope. Hope that does not disappoint, hope that is certain. For it is grounded in the knowledge of God's love. And it is that hope that can help us when we lose a loved one. And so All Souls' Day is a time for both remembrance and hope, a time for both sorrow and joy, a time for both regret and thankfulness.

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