

All Souls

Death is a great mystery to those of us on this side of it! The promised reality of eternal life is beyond our sight. How can we understand it? Perhaps we have experienced a glimpse through the veil of death – a near-death experience, felt the very real presence of a loved one who has died, or even mid-wifed a soul into the next life. The ancient wisdom writers had some knowledge of this – as we hear today in the wisdom of Solomon:

‘But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and no torment will ever touch them.

In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,
and their departure was thought to be a disaster,
and their going from us to be their destruction;
but they are at peace.’

When we lose those whom we love through death’s dark veil, the intensity of our grief can be overwhelming (there is nothing foolish about grief! – the shock and emptiness, the hollowing out of our being can leave us feeling as though we have lost part of ourselves. Hopes and dreams are shattered and life as we knew it, is no longer. We are ‘broken-hearted’. Grief is an emotional rollercoaster that we have no choice but to ride out – a black hole that we cannot avoid but need to accommodate. Grief is like our fingerprint – unique to each of us. We need to grieve in our own way and in our own time. Slowly, very slowly, the black hole of emptiness and sorrow is accommodated - it gradually diminishes, and a new normal begins to emerge. We – the living – hold our dead in our hearts and our memories, and the rituals of the Church helps us to pause and remember and to express our thanksgiving, our hope and our faith, in the eternal goodness and compassion of our Creator God.

Through our holy scriptures and the foundation of our faith – the life, death and resurrection of our living bread - Jesus Christ – we can receive and affirm the promise of eternal life.

As 1 Peter states:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

So today is a special opportunity to remember our deceased loved ones, to offer heartfelt prayer and to honour the Holy One who loved them into life and received them in death. All Souls Day reminds us that the veil between this life and the next is very thin. Our prayers radiate beyond this lifetime, into the eternal presence, mystery and love of God. Conversely, in the interdependence of life, the prayers and energies of deceased beloved friends and family members may support us on our earthly pilgrimages.

We believe that God will heal and transform all creation and that all people will eventually find wholeness in God's holy adventure beyond this lifetime. Death does not end the human adventure, nor does it terminate God's love for us.

As we gather at the Lord's table, surrounded on every side by a great cloud of witnesses, we feed on Jesus the living bread – given, for the life of the world; a foretaste of what is to come. We anticipate the Holy Banquet that awaits us in God's eternal kingdom.

Thanks be to God.