

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? Amen.

We're celebrating All Saints' Day today, a great festival in the church's year. And one of its chief characteristics is that it's a festival that has a past, a present, and a future aspect.

All Saints falls in a season of remembering. There's Veterans Day coming up soon when we honor those who've served in the military, All Souls' Day, the Day of the Dead, all marked by remembering those who have gone before. And All Saints' Day too has that element of remembrance.

We give thanks particularly on this day for those who've played a part in shaping us, who've been significant in sharing the faith with us. And in passing, let me offer a word to the grandparents in the congregation this morning. I've been in several groups recently when we've begun by sharing how we've come to faith, and I've been struck on every occasion by the number of people who say it was their grandparents who first spoke to them about Jesus, who've encouraged them in the faith along the way. There's clearly a particular role to play in that regard as grandparents. And I would guess today, if we think about those who've shared faith with us, many of us will be thinking about our grandparents, maybe a Sunday school teacher, a friend.

And such remembrances might well be tinged with sadness. Losing those we love and care for who've had an impact on our lives is always a painful process. And such pain is very present in our Gospel reading. It's full of tears. In fact, all our readings are full of tears. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, was weeping. The Jews who came to see Jesus with her were weeping, we're told. And Jesus himself famously wept.

"Jesus wept", [is] the shortest verse in the Bible and one of the more profound. Jesus Himself was moved to tears at the loss of His friend Lazarus. And in Greek what's translated here as "deeply moved", it means the sound of a horse snorting. We can assume that Jesus was seized by a deep emotion that led to a great involuntary groan from

the depths of His heart. Jesus knew the pain of losing a loved one. And Jesus is here living out His teaching in the Beatitudes that we are to mourn with those who mourn. The call on us is not to cheer up those who mourn. We're to weep with those who weep.

And tears serve a good, wholesome, and helpful purpose. The biochemist William Frey found that emotional tears contain more toxic byproducts than the tears we get when we peel an onion. The shedding of tears is a way for the body to get rid of toxins that build up in our body, courtesy of stress. And tears release a natural soporific that acts as a tranquilizer to the body, which is why we're often so tired after a good cry. And it's strange how people often, especially English people, apologize for crying, when tears are good for us. We are not to be afraid to cry, and we shouldn't be afraid of being with someone else as they cry.

I regularly have people who say to me, "I don't come to church so often now because every time I come, I cry." That's not an uncommon phenomenon. And that always makes me sad because tears are also often the sign of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, presence of the Spirit, often leads us to tears.

And of course, our two readings today also referred to tears. John presents in that reading from Revelation a vision of a new heaven and a new earth. He writes of the promise that God will be with His people, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

The reason that we can enter into the depth of the pain of death is we know it's not the last word. Jesus wept with Martha and Mary, even though He knew He could, or He would, be able to raise Lazarus from the dead. He wept with them because He shared their pain.

We live in a death-denying culture that shies away from the reality and pain of death at every opportunity. There's a poem which I'm sometimes asked to read at funerals, and sometimes I'm brave enough to say I won't do it. But if I do, I do it squirming. And it includes the line, "Death is

nothing at all." Nonsense. The grief of losing someone is overwhelming. It's not to be diminished, it's to be embraced with the people as a people of hope. Embraced as not being the last word, but not denied. And we don't have to pretend that death is anything other than overwhelming, because we know that death is swallowed up in victory.

We live as a people of hope, knowing that one day God will wipe away all tears. But that day has not yet come. In Ephesians, Paul prays that his readers will have their eyes of their hearts enlightened, that they may know the hope to which that they have been called, the riches of the glorious inheritance of the saints. Our hope is that death is not the last word, but rather the portal to a new, glorious resurrection life, a life enjoyed by all the saints who have gone ahead of us to form a great cloud of witnesses that surround us.

So, I've mentioned the past element of All Saints' Day and the importance of a future hope that it brings. But also, as I've said, All Saints' Day has a message for the present. We need to be aware in this present time that we are numbered amongst the saints. When St. Paul begins his letters by saying, "Grace and peace to the saints in the church," he's not saying addressing that just to the leaders or the particularly holy people in the church. *All* the people he calls are saints. And All Saints' Day, one of its unique aspects is it's the one day in the church's year when we are counted amongst the people who are being remembered and celebrated.

You might be sitting next, well, you *are* sitting next to a saint this morning, harder to believe in some cases than others, but nevertheless, it's true. The best definition I ever heard of a saint was from a little girl, and she'd spent the day looking at a very grand cathedral. And her favorite bit of the cathedral was the windows. She enjoyed the windows, learning about the saints in the windows, the pattern the glass made on the floor. And she got home, and her mother said to her, "So have you had a good day?" She said, "Yes." She said, "Well, what was the best part of your day?" She

said, "Oh, learning about the saints." And her mother said, "Oh, what did you learn about the saints?" She said, "The saints are the people who let the light shine through," which is a great definition of what a saint is.

We are the people through whom God's light is to shine. I met someone on Cursillo a couple of times ago I went, but it made a very strong impression on me. I shared the peace with this chap, and he's someone I knew a bit, but not very well, and he's very humble and unassuming, by which I mean that he's someone who you could spend the weekend with and really not notice that he's there, but he checks that all the logistics goes smoothly. But as I greeted him, I was overwhelmed as I shook his hand with the presence of God. In a way, that's often a sort of, you just shake someone's hand and say, "Peace be with you." But on this moment, I was suddenly taken aback and I thought, "Goodness me. What's happening here?" And then I realized he was letting God's light shine through in a way that one's not often very aware of.

And we are the saints of God. We're all called to allow God's light to shine through us. Each of us has God's light within us. We are the people called to pass on that light. We are the ones who may be in 20, 30, 40 years' time, there's people remembering us on All Saints' Day for the way that we shared God's light with them and had an influence on them.

So, on this day, All Saints' Day, let's resolve to live up to that calling that we each have as saints of God. Amen.