

## All Souls

St. Brandon's

1 Peter 1: 3-9; John 6: 37-40

2 November 2021

Our readings share a common conviction of life beyond this life. In and through Jesus Christ we *will* inherit eternal life, and He *will* raise us up at the last day. This is an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade because it is kept safe for us in heaven. We can, and should, rejoice in this because, while we live, we are always in the process of receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

And not only should we rejoice for ourselves, but we can and should also rejoice for those who have already gone before us. Those whose names will be read out shortly, others known to us, many not known to us – those who are, in a sense, already on the other side of this divide, and who know for themselves the truth of these promises in which we share. They already experience the reality of what for us is only presently a common conviction of life beyond this life.

But while this offers us a reassurance to which we should hold firm, the reading from 1 Peter in particular does also present a somewhat triumphalist picture – that all will be well, at least for those who believe – together with something of a divide between those of us who are still 'down here' and those who are already 'up there'. Our only thought, apparently, should be about looking forward to joining them. And if we do suffer grief in all kinds of trials, well it has the purpose of refining our faith, and anyway all will be well in the end.

And I am not sure that quite matches with the whole of our experience. For death can often leave unfinished business certainly for us and, so it would seem, for those who have passed on. Damaged and damaging relationships, misunderstandings unresolved, words of love or apology or explanation unspoken, the need to forgive and to be forgiven – what are we, and they, to do with such pain and incompleteness?

Then there is the difficult question of those who may have died not in the faith of Christ – the vast number of the unfaithful departed. We need to allow that we will never know the true state of another person's relationship with God in Christ, whether they have professed such a faith in this life or not – that is between them and God. But we may still feel legitimately uncomfortable about those, known to us or not, who we suspect have died not in the faith of Christ. And we may well have a sense that salvation is complete for none until it is complete for all. Today is *All Souls* day, after all. Indeed, as we know from St Paul's writing in Romans, the whole of creation groans as it waits for redemption (8: 19-23). What are we to do with that pain and incompleteness?

In the end, there are I think two things that we might do with such pain and incompleteness, both that which is ours individually, and that which is of a more general nature for the whole created order, including those who have died not in the faith of Christ. The first is simply to pray, 'Lord have mercy'. We all are in the hands of almighty God, and we can do no other than trust in His mercy and His unfailing love. The second, which is I think true to our experience, is to believe that we all, both those of us 'down here' and those 'up there', are not divided, but are held together in a great web of mutual love and support.

Together, against the pain and incompleteness that we experience now, in love and support of one another both now and in all eternity, and in and through Christ who reconciles all things to God, we can look forward to the end of all that pain and incompleteness. Indeed, we can look forward to the redemption of the whole of creation. And in that we can and should rejoice.

Amen