Feast of All Souls

"The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God." "

These words from our readings are full of hope, full of promise. They are words that have brought comfort to generation upon generation, for hundreds, even thousands, of years. They speak to that profound human need for a place of safety and belonging. As human beings we look for ways to belong. Places to call home, where our very existence is cherished and treasured unconditionally. The reading from the Book of Wisdom speaks of God's tenderness, holding us gently through all our life and most gently of all at the hour of our death. It is St Brandon's tradition that on this day. All Soul's Day we remember before God the names of those of this community who have died during the past year as well as loved ones who have died in the past . We have a years of names to treasure and to cherish in this place that was special to each of them. It is good that today we are able to welcome some of their nearest and dearest in person,

Belonging matters. Belonging to a Church and/or village community or having a lifelong affinity, reflecting the profound impact that being part of a community such as this has on people's lives as they pass through it,matters to each departed membe rand family . It also reflects the profound impact that each of these people have made on this community both during their time here and in the many ways in which they have kept in touch with the parish afterwards. Each year this parish reinvents itself, but it does so building on the gifts and memories and values of past generations.

St Brandon's and the parish of Brancepeth treasures its people. We seek to care for and cherish each family. At this service is also an act of care and cherishing for the faithful who have departed this life. It is an occasion on which we are able to articulate our hope and trust that just as they belonged here so also they now belong in the household of God and the peace of heaven. This evening the words and the music, the candles and the silence, and the solace of community with one another are all here to help us to place these precious children of God into God's loving hands, confident in the promise of Jesus Christ that he would prepare a place for each of us.

But in grief our hearts are troubled. It is a human reality that faith may bring us hope, but it does not erase our pain, and that love comes at a cost: a cost that we bear most acutely when those we love are taken from us, whether after a long and full life or far too soon. We gather in prayer tonight, in communion

with all the saints living and departed, whose lives with all their loves, encouragements and mistakes witness to their lives with us. There is a real sense that wherever we gather, those who have gone with us are there, having shaped our lives and the way we respond to the present. The presence of those who have died shapes the actions of us the living, most often because we loved them.

This summed up in the words of the poem which Martin will read to us now

Remember by Christina Rossetti

Remember me when I am gone away,

Gone far away into the silent land;

When you can no more hold me by the hand,

Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.

Remember me when no more day by day

You tell me of our future that you plann'd:

Only remember me; you understand

It will be late to counsel then, or pray.

Yet if you should forget me for a wile

And afterwards remember, do not grieve:

For if the darkness and corruption leave

A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,

Far better that you should forget and smile

Than that you should remember and be sad.

When Martin and I were looking at this poem together we came up with the following

The subtext of this poem seems to be about forgiveness and how the grieving process is about coming to terms that, with death, the chance to forgive and be forgiven has gone and yet at the same time becomes possible. We can square the circle and through memory accept the imperfections of ourselves

and our relationships – forgive and be forgiven -all things finally being made whole. Which, I guess, is a Christian sense of heaven where we are made whole and perfect at last.

So to conclude my All Soul's Reflection

There is room in God's heart for us, in all our grief and pain and anger, and the complexity of emotions that overtake us when someone dies. And so in the stillness of this evening, we pray for peace: for the peace of heaven to surround our departed loved ones, and for the peace that passes all understanding to fill our own hearts and minds this night and always. Let us be clear: the saints do not invite us to learn how to die, but instead how to live the rest of our lives. Let us pray that God will give us the faith, hope and love which are the gifts of his kingdom for all the saints and for all of us, now and in the future.

To end, some words of John Donne:

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven, to enter into that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but one equal music; no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession; no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity: in the habitations of thy majesty and glory, world without end. Amen.