

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time – November 4/5, 2017 – Mass of Remembrance Reflection

After a long and luxurious summer, the past few days have finally treated us to some crisp fall New England weather which, unfortunately, is a portent of the chill and the ice, the sleet and the snow to come. All around us, nature is getting ready for the onslaught of winter's fury. The maples and the oaks, after a last gasp of spectacular color, are fast dropping their dying leaves to the ground as they send their sap, their lifeblood, deep into the earth where it will warm the roots and keep the trees' cores alive through the cold. Squirrels are running around like maniacs gathering acorns and burying them all over the place. Hopefully they'll even remember a few of the hiding places when the snow flies and food is scarce. And, even spring has pulled the covers over and settled in for a long winter's nap as the bulbs of April's crocuses, daffodils, hyacinths, and tulips lie dormant in the frozen soil until they are warmed by the sun and watered by April's showers. All around us, there is cold and darkness as the earth seems to be losing ground and dying right before our eyes.

How fitting, then, that in our part of the world, the Season of All Souls where we remember and pray for our beloved brothers and sisters who have died comes when nature is so in tune with the spirit of remembering. Just as we remember the summer with its light and warmth, its blooming gardens and fresh vegetables, its life and energy; just as we wish we could hold on to all of that forever, or at least one

more week, even one more day, so we are with the people we have loved who are no longer with us; we remember their light and their warmth, the seeds they planted in us, the lessons that took root, their vibrancy, their laughter, their song, their blessing to us. And now they're gone and we're left feeling empty, lonely, sad, missing them a little more with each day that passes, each holiday when their place at the table isn't filled.

What can be said about this dying? What good is it? What kind of mean spirited God would allow such closeness and love, only to yank it all away in a sickness or an accident, in a little child or in a beloved elder, in the good who die young or a monster that wreaks havoc too long, or even in His own, only, innocent Son??

The writer H. A. Williams reflects on all of this cycle of living and dying in his book *TRUE RESURRECTION*. He writes: "The miracle of our being given life beyond the grave is not greater than the miracle of our continually being given life here. Creativity is ever one and the same. It is always the calling into being of the non-existent; and to those who are created it means forever receiving what forever is being given. If in this life we know that we are poor, that we are nothing and have nothing which we are not receiving from the unknown, then it will not seem uniquely strange that life should continue to be given beyond the boundaries of physical death."

All right ... maybe my mind even buys that there is life after death. Maybe there is a heaven. Maybe souls that go there are happy. But my heart is still broken. I can't hold him anymore. I'm starting to forget the sound of her voice. My kids will never know how wonderful their

Grandma really was. We never made up. I waited too long to tell him that I truly loved him.

A little over 1500 years ago there lived a very wise and learned priest named John. The people who listened to his talks even gave him a nickname: "Golden Tongue ... Chrysostom". But like all of us even the priest and preacher was not to be spared heartache. When his Mom died, he was crushed. Still he celebrated her funeral Mass and spoke from his heart: "The one whom I knew, and loved, and have lost for awhile, is no longer where she was. She is wherever I am, because she is with God, and God is closer to us than we are to ourselves."

Their earthly journey is over; they have arrived at their last and forever station; and waiting for them when they get off is God, the same God who waits for us at this table, the same God who comes to us in this Sacred Meal, the same God who brings all the souls who are with Him to this place, to this Communion each time the Holy Mass is celebrated. Here God, here our beloved dead are closer to us than we are to ourselves.