

Readings for All Souls Day

FIRST READING: Wisdom 3:1-9

A reading from the Book of Wisdom:

The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace. For if before men, indeed, they be punished, yet is their hope full of immortality; chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself. In the time of their visitation they shall shine, and shall dart about as sparks through stubble; they shall judge nations and rule over peoples, and the LORD shall be their King forever. Those who trust in him shall understand truth, and the faithful shall abide with him in love: because grace and mercy are with his holy ones, and his care is with his elect.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage.

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

GOSPEL: Matthew 5:1-12a

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will

be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for All Souls Day

COVID 19 has killed five million people, world wide, to date. Consider this; there are five million one hundred six thousand seven hundred eighty people living in Cook County today. The number of those who have died of the virus is close to our local county's population. Since the pandemic has begun, I've buried a few of them and have known some of them too. Today we remember them in prayer. All of us have lost family, friends and acquaintances in death. We entrust the dead to God's loving arms. Each of us will die too. We entrust ourselves and all the living to God's embrace as well. We know that death is as much to life as is birth. What does our faith offer us? Hope, comfort, consolation? If it does, is it enough?

Such a question may seem strange, almost blasphemous. As human beings, such thoughts, though private, prevail. We're good at telling God what we want. We like to present to God ourselves at our best. We show God our prayers, devotion and piety. Yet God knows us in a deeper way. God knows our doubts, fears, anger and negative thoughts; even though we strive to hide them from God. God has made us and knows us better than we know ourselves. God knows that we all have one abiding question, "Why?" How many of us have decided to ask God when we meet face to face after we die?

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he wrote, "Wherefore, so that I should not get above myself, I was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan to batter me and prevent me from getting above myself. About this, I have three times pleaded with the Lord that it might leave me; but he has answered me, 'My grace is enough for you: for power is at full stretch in weakness.' It is, then, about my weaknesses that I am happiest of all to boast, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Perhaps I am not alone in facing God in doubt and wonderment.

How is God's grace sufficient? We can have a childish expectation of how God should work. If I do this for you, Lord, you will do this for me! This flies in the face of the prayer Jesus taught us. My kingdom come, my will be done is what we really want to pray in the Our Father. We can expect God's mighty intervention to alter our reality and to restore what we feel we've lost. The one, sobering insight into this is Jesus prayer to his Father on the night before he faced torture and death. Three times he prayed, "Dad, take this cup from me!" How did God, Jesus own Dad answer? With Judas, the lynch mob, the kangaroo court, the bloody beating, being stripped naked in public and to be crucified to death. What can we, then, expect from our God who did this to his own son?

Each time I put forth this scenario, I leave something out on purpose. Jesus' prayer to his Dad ended with the words, "Not my will; but thine be done!" That's what we actually pray in the prayer Jesus taught us. I use the archaic form of the English second personal pronoun. Jesus had addressed his Father with the word Abba. It means daddy or papa. Obviously, God did not give his son what he wanted. God gave Jesus what he needed to accomplish the mission that

was his from before the creation. Jesus was the sacrifice for sin, ours; once and for all. The Word God spoke in Jesus to us was simple, "I love you."

It's easy to lose sight of that amidst Jesus bloody death. It's easier to forget that as we live our lives today. God doesn't work magically transforming our reality. God transforms us through faith. Yes, people I have known and loved have died. Those still alive have helped to heal. God works through each of us. The subtlety of sign shows God's divine power to save. God works through us, believers or not. To know God in simplicity is far more effective than seeking God in what's extraordinary. Simplicity is always part of our experience as are those around us.

The souls of the just are not just the dead. Each human person has been justified in the death and resurrection of Jesus. All have been saved, forgiven and live because of Jesus' once and for all action. We live now as the dead live forever in Christ. Eternal life is our hope now. Since, however, eternal life only comes after death, most of us don't hope for death any time soon. As Bishop Sheen put it, "Life is worth living." I add one word, "Now!"

The Beatitudes show how God actually works. What is God's blessing? It's not getting all the green lights or winning the lottery. The poor, thirsty and hungry can know God's presence. Knowing God's presence is the blessing. Holiness is only a thought away; so are our loved ones. God entrusted them to us and now we can trust God. God's promise is still ours as God's love embraces in eternity those we still love. That love endures beyond death is a most subtle and sublime glimpse of the truth of God's promise. We catch a glimpse of eternity.

God is near to the hurting, persecuted and weak. Whenever we turn to God, think of God or wonder about God's ways, God is there. God never turns away those who seek God's presence. God never leaves us. As God never leaves us, neither have those who have died. They live in our memories and remain part of our lives as we share the good they've given us. Whenever we remember them, whether in joy, gratitude or grief, we do so in love. Where there is love, God is near. Our memory is God's blessing. This morning we remember, together in Christ. As Jesus is with us so are those who've died with him.

May we all find rest in God when we need it the most.

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November 2, 2021