



"Called to Higher Things"

Reflection for All Saints and All Souls

2-3 November 2025

Mgr Daniel McHugh

"We should be called children of God; and so we are." (1 John 3:1)

Recently I was invited to lead a Funeral Service in Church followed by a Cremation for a man whose family I knew way back in my home parish in school days. It was a privilege to be asked and to be able to make a spiritual contribution to the celebration of his life, which had been rich in work, sport, and friendships. I began with speaking of life in our parish and at school, our love of Rugby and support for Coventry City Football Club. Then I chose to go on to speak about the Resurrection, something that would not have been covered by those good friends paying tributes in Church and at the Crematorium. More than one person came to speak to me afterwards to say how much they appreciated the way I had conducted the Service; I felt that having built a relationship of empathy with the Congregation they were ready for more in terms of our core belief as Christians, I was able to tell them that our deceased friend had asked for the Anointing as he approached death so showing his belief in something higher, that we are called to higher things, as St Paul says in Colossians 3:2, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Remembering that Pope Leo had spoken recently about the Resurrection and how it transforms every aspect of our lives, I focussed on the readings we had just heard that were chosen by the family: Philippians 3:20-21 "Our citizenship is in

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heaven” and the Gospel of St John 14:1-6 and the words of our Lord: “I go before you to prepare a place for you.”

I said, and I quote “that vision of new life to come impacts on our life here e.g. our respect for human body and for life itself: without wishing to be political it explains our questioning of what we see as taking life in Abortion and the ending of life Bill before Parliament: we are created by God and are called to a higher life in Him.”

We were due to go to the Crematorium after the Funeral Service in Church, and I continued: “It also explains why we are concerned that after Cremation our ashes are placed in an Urn and interred in ground that is Blessed.” I continued in the light of November being so near: “In November, as you know, we remember those who have died in war. The Poppies we wear as a symbol of respect for them. And, Catholic priests go to the graves of parishioners to bless them. I will get my Mum and Dad’s grave ready with flowers/plants for the Blessing at Oscott Cemetery.” At the back of my mind was an Interment of Ashes I had taken a few days before that of our friend from school days where no Funeral Service had taken place – the Cremation was without any family present, though there was family. On that occasion, I was able to “save the day” so to speak, by having a very short ceremony in the Cemetery. I suspect that in these days when Undertakers in a competitive world are very much conscious of money saving, different “deals” are promoted that have little to do with respect or prayers for those who have died.

In both cases I concluded my words with this prayer of offering found in a Jubilee Prayer Book in Salthill, Co Galway, Ireland:

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“Lord, we give our loved one back to you,
and just as you first gave him/her to us
and did not lose him/her in the giving,
so we have not lost him/her
in returning him/her to you.

For life is eternal,
love is immortal,
death is only an horizon,
and an horizon is nothing
but the limit of our sight.

We hold him/her close within our hearts,
and there he/she shall remain,
to walk with us throughout our lives
until we meet again.”

With the celebration of the Solemnity of All Saints (transferred from 1 to 2 November this year) and All Souls – the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (3 November this year) we come to the celebration of the Communion of Saints, our belief which we proclaim each Sunday in the Creed. In his Commentary Fr Ferlita says: “All Saints, not just those we know by name, and who we celebrate throughout the year, but all those have run the race, with their eyes fixed on Jesus... a “great multitude” (Rev 7:9) of people, which in St John’s vision no one can count, “from all tribes and peoples and languages.” Ferlita continues: “In the Gospel Jesus brings promise of the Father to another multitude, to a crowd of people still on the way, brings it, therefore, to us. Where do we see ourselves in the Blesseds he names in the Beatitudes?” I feel that those

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who choose this Sunday's Gospel Matthew 5:12 for the Funeral Service of a loved one, often see the way he or she lived reflected in this passage. On this day, we too are challenged to model our lives on the spirit and promises of the Beatitudes (cf Sunday Connection). Catholics believe that death can separate us from those we love only for a while. We are still united with them in the Communion of Saints. On All Souls Day and throughout November we pray for those who may be waiting for the full joy of heaven in Purgatory. We pray for them knowing that they too have the power to intercede for us. The Church encourages us to pray for our loved ones and all the departed by offering a "plenary indulgence" applicable to the souls in Purgatory through devoutly visiting a Church or Public Oratory on 3 November and praying Our Father and the Creed.

The eeriness of the pagan festival celebrated at Halloween (Eve of All Saints) may be good natured, but the darkness and witchcraft associated with the Celtic celebration marking harvest time cannot compare to the Hope and New Life brought to us in Christ, which the Church celebrates with All Saints and All Souls.

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