

Homily for Feast of All Souls And Memorial Mass for Cremains

November 2, 2019
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Kawkawlin, Michigan

Yesterday we gathered to celebrate the lives of all the saints of God, the holy men, women and children deemed officially by the Church worthy of the glory and grace of heaven. Today we remember all the other souls of the faithful departed, whom we hope to be welcomed by God in His eternal dwelling in heaven.

The Church has always promoted the praying for our deceased loved ones and teaches the value of this practice. Oftentimes people make the assumption that their loved one is automatically going to heaven. We can never presume anything such as this. Yes, it is God's will that all people are saved, but the ultimate judgment belongs to God and not to us. We can only live in hope that heaven becomes a reality for our loved ones and for us by the way we live our lives. If heaven were automatic, why would the Church need to pray for their deceased loved ones?

The celebration of All Souls Day is based on the theological basis that some of those who have departed from this world, have not been perfectly cleansed from venial sin, or have not fully atoned for their past transgression. As such, being temporarily deprived of the beatified vision until such time as they have been completely sanctified in Christ, these departed souls are to remain in Purgatory.

"All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven."
[CC 1040]

The Church invites us to pray in a very special way, give alms and do works of penance for all the deceased, for our loved ones and friends, but also for all those who have died whom we have never known. There are many who have no one to pray for them.

This is why we gather today in this special way for this memorial service for these unclaimed cremains. These individuals have no one to pray for them. They have not received a burial proper to their human dignity. But we will

doing this today, giving these men, women and children a proper burial. From what I know, there are 175 people who will be interred in the “community crypts.”

These individuals, these children of God, we know very little about. We know their names, but we know very little about them. But we do know that their lives have value; in the eyes of God and in our eyes, they belong to Him.

Like all of our loved ones who have died who we honor today as well, because these individuals too have been created in God’s image and likeness, they are sacred to us. Each one of them, in the eyes of God, are part of the Body of Christ – regardless of their faith, or if they had no specific faith at all. So we are here today to show our love and care and concern for our brothers and sisters by upholding their God given dignity and providing them a final resting place where they will be remembered.

Each of these individuals have a history. What we know about some of these 175 individuals is that there are 6 babies; 13 veterans; and there are 4 married couples. In most cases, we know the name and date of death, as well as the city/township. There are a few whose names we do know, though. This community of people includes people of all ages. One individual we know died at the age of 91 (he was born in the late 1800s and died in 1985). The oldest cremains come from an individual who died in 1972. The most recent unclaimed cremains are from this year (2019).

These children of God have all been part of a family. Why their cremains have been left behind is unknown to me. Though their lives remain a mystery to all of us, every aspect of their lives, every experience of their lives is known God. We do not know what their faith life may have been; we don’t know if they were even believers. But God knows. And in the mystery of Christ’s love, they too have been offered salvation because it is God’s will that all people will be saved.

The Scripture readings for this Mass help guide our reflection today as they touch on the reality of death in general. They speak to us of God’s desire for his creation – for each of us, including those whom cremains lay before us. They remind us of what we can expect – the hope of encountering the love of the Father.

Jesus was clear in sharing his desire. *“And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day. Everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have*

eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day.”

We hope and pray that the souls of these individuals before us are given eternal life. We ask the Lord to grant this because of the faith of this community gathered today – because of the faith of all of us. We don't know if they believed in the Resurrection, but we do. And we know that all of them (and us) have been saved through the blood of Jesus Christ. We live in this hope, a hope flowing from the Paschal Mystery. And this hope does not disappoint. If we walk with the Lord in life, he will never disappoint us!

To believe in the resurrection is to come to realize just how much God loves us in spite of our imperfections; in spite of the ways we don't fully love others. That in spite of it all, we have a God whose heart's desire is life with us...here and now and in the life to come. You and I live in this hope and in this promise.

In gathering on this Feast of All Souls, the Good News today is that death is nothing to fear. It is nothing to run from, not that we can because it will happen to all of us. Jesus has brought dignity to death.

Some words of St. Ambrose from today's Office of Reading speak to this. *“What more should we say about his death since we use this divine example to prove that it was death alone that won freedom from death, and death itself was its own redeemer? Death is then no cause for mourning, for it is the cause of mankind's salvation. Death is not something to be avoided, for the son of god did not think it beneath his dignity, nor did he seek to escape it.”*

The dignity of Christ's death on the cross has given meaning, not only to our lives, but to our deaths as well.

In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want “any to perish, but all to come to repentance.”

So we gather here today to pray for all of our loved ones who have gone before us. We gather here today to pray for these men, women and children whom we will lay rest.

We gather to worship the God who gives us eternal life...whose love is so powerful that even death could not have the last word. Again, in the words of Jesus:

“I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it [on] the last day.”