

MEMORIAL MASS – ALL SOULS
November 5, 2007

Today we have come together to commemorate all those who have been laid to rest from our parish during this past year. It's a sad remembrance, but it's also a time of hope. Our faith tells us that we all look forward to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in which we all share.

We've all lost someone we love this past year. A few days ago I was listing those I particularly wanted to remember in prayer during this month of November when we recall all the dead, and I came up with, among others, a nun who has been a friend of my family for many years who died on Good Friday, the father of a very dear friend who died in January after a lengthy illness, and my cousin's prematurely born twins, who both died within a day after their birth last summer.

Yes, there is much sadness in death. In last Friday's edition of the *Pittsburgh Catholic*, there is a wonderful article about death and heaven in the Questions and Answers column on page 7, written by Fr. Charles Bober. He was asked: "How much do we know about heaven?" He says, "Despite our faith and the hope it offers, we feel the pain of seeing those we love so much go beyond us into an existence about which we know so little." So it's not just the sadness of death that is difficult, but the uncertainty.

But Fr. Bober goes on to say, "The final reality that seems a part of almost every description of heaven is fullness of all the things that made them happy on earth....As we continue to ponder what lies ahead for us, we need to always remember that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us and that where he is, we will be fulfilled." Later in this Mass we will hear the words, "Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended."

Our readings this evening provide us with an even greater message of consolation. The great OT prophet Isaiah in the first reading compares death with a holy mountain. In the OT, mountain tops were considered holy places, because their height was thought to be closer to God. Here, we are told, God will destroy death forever and will wipe away the tears from all faces.

In the second reading, St. Paul writes to the Romans and tells them that "we suffer with Christ so that we may also be glorified with him." He later says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us."

The Gospel reading was purposely taken from St. John's account of the Resurrection of Jesus. Of all people, it is Mary Magdalene who finds the tomb of Jesus empty and, fearing that the tomb has been robbed, she runs off to get Peter and "the other disciple", probably St. John. When they arrive at the tomb they find it is indeed empty, just as Mary Magdalene reported. What were they to think? It wasn't an everyday occurrence that someone would rise from the dead.

Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene, we are told, stood weeping beside the tomb. Who among us here has not done that? We all know the feeling of loss and grief she was experiencing.

But then she sees something that will change her life forever. Jesus himself stands before her, yet she doesn't recognize him. Before we criticize her too harshly for what appears to be stupidity or cluelessness, how often do we come upon the presence of Christ in another person and fail to recognize it until sometime later, if at all? When Mary Magdalene finally realizes who it is, she is overcome with joy, and rushes off to spread the Good News that Jesus truly is risen. This is our responsibility as well, to proclaim the presence of the risen Christ in the world.

All of this is fine, but it doesn't bring back the one we have lost, and it doesn't erase our grief, nor is it really supposed to. So what do we do? How do we manage to deal with our grief until that day when we will see that loved one again?

I don't know. But one of the poets has written, "God has given us memories so that we may have roses in December. We all know that in the cold darkness of winter, the rose dies. We look out our window and see that the magnificent rose that has graced our yard with beauty all summer is gone. It's a sad day, but we also know that the rose will be back again in the springtime, when everything in our yard comes back to life again. And until that time, the rose lives in our memory. We are able to recall its beauty and the wonderful way it has blessed our life.

For each of us today, our rose has gone. But in the midst of our loss we know that person will return to life in the springtime of the Resurrection, when all of us come back to life again. And until that time, our loved one lives on in our memory, and always will.

In the Holy Saturday Office of Readings (Holy Saturday of course marking a time of silence as Jesus lay in the tomb), we find this wonderful quote from an ancient homily for that day: "O sleeper awake! Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; Together we form only one person, and cannot be separated."

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let your perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, rest in peace. Amen.