

2024 B ALL SOULS DAY Nov. 04

Today we gather to Commemorate the faithful departed and give thanks for our loved ones who have died.

We all have something in common which has brought us to this service. The loss of one or more loved ones, and as we join together in the words of the service, the hymns and the prayers, we can draw comfort from one another as a community.

But this service of commemoration also gives us the opportunity to reflect on the many memories we cherish and hold onto as we let go of our loved one's presence with us daily, and entrust them to our loving Father in heaven.

One of the greatest gifts that God has given us is the Gift of Memories, and whether our loved one died recently or in years gone by, We now treasure the memory of those times that we have had together. Times of joy, times of sorrow, times of sadness and times of fun, and the memory of how they enriched our lives continues in our remembrance.

It's also fair to say that The Bible is a book of memories. Memories of God and how he nurtured his chosen people in the good and bad times in their lives. Our first reading from Ecclesiastes spoke about the different times they encountered, and how these experiences shaped their lives.

For some here it will still be very much a time to mourn, where some gathered will want to weep as an expression of your sorrow, and this is perfectly right and natural to do.

For others it may be a time of healing as they have passed through the initial grief, and are now beginning to come to terms with the loss, and although we know that our loss will never fully leave us, in time many of us will come to a time of laughter, where recalling the happy memories brings us joy and happiness rather than the feeling of total loss which can at times feel all consuming,

Over the years my view of loss and death has altered considerably, and much of this has been through the privilege I have had of walking with countless families as they have prepared for their loved one's funeral. Every time I meet a family, I don't know what to expect, sometimes they are overcome by the grief of loss, and at other times there can be a feeling of peace. I sometimes meet a family who are able to laugh because of the character of the person who has died, but more often than not I see the tears of love and sadness in their eyes as they begin to come to terms with their loss.

It is through all of these experiences I have learnt the healing power of the happy memories that are held within a family. It doesn't diminish the loss in any way, instead it allows the family to cherish their loved one in a way which can feel unexpected.

A little while ago I was given this poem by Clare Capron which is based on a passage of scripture in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, the words have stayed with me and I would like to share them with you

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away

the dearest objects of our earthly love.

Now they are safe in His almighty keeping

safe in the Home prepared by Him above.

Neither could we have faced the final parting

but for His consolation deep and strong.

He came to find and heal the broken-hearted

to even change their grief to song.

It is as we accept the way of trial

relinquish to him what we hold most dear.

That He "the God of comfort" and of mercies

will ever draw us to Himself more near.

He will enrich our lives beyond expecting
just by the very things He takes away.

And will enable us to be a means of comfort
to others in distress one future day.

This poem encapsulates one of the questions which is most often on
the hearts of those who are bereaved. What happens after death?

It is through our second reading from St John's Gospel that we begin to
see an answer to that question. We recall that through Christ's death
and resurrection that we as Christians are given new life through him.