

All Souls' Day

'And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.' (John 6.39)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

'Death is nothing at all.' So starts an extract from a sermon preached by Henry Scott Holland on the death of Edward VII. It's often used, although rather out of its context, at funerals. I don't for a second want to rubbish what many people find an extremely encouraging and consoling piece of poetry, but I *do* want to very gently challenge the notion that 'Death is nothing at all'.

For if death is nothing at all, then why are we here this evening? What's the point of All Souls' Day? The thing is: death *is* something. We are here this evening to remember, to give thanks and to pray for those who have passed from this life. We are here because death *means* something to us.

Death *is* something because it separates us from those we have loved and lost. We come here this evening bearing in our hearts those who have had a profound influence on our lives: parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, children, grandchildren, spouses, lovers, friends, neighbours... And on All Souls' Day we are given the opportunity to bring those relationships sharply into focus. And so we come here to do all the 'churchy things' for our loved ones departed: remember, give thanks, light candles, pray, offer the Mass. But it may also, and quite rightly, stir up within us regrets, hurts, failures, even anger and resentment. And, be it days, weeks, months or years since their passing, it might give us the space we need to do a bit more mourning, a bit more grieving. Why? Because death is *not* nothing at all. Death is *something*. Death *is*. And we shouldn't hide ourselves away from it.

Today we offer a Requiem Mass, a Eucharist for the Dead. And there is nothing more fitting we can do for our loved ones departed. Here in the Eucharist, in the offering of bread and wine, is set forth and re-presented a very particular death: the death of Jesus. This is the

death that proves that death is more than nothing at all, because this death isn't just *something*, this death is *everything*. This is the turning point in salvation history. God assumes and embraces our humanity and, hanging on the cross, redeems it. And so *death* becomes the gateway to *life*. God restores and reconciles us to himself. As God dies a human death and rises to new life, so we can die a human death, and rise to a new life with him.

I don't offer this to you as merely a theological concept or an historical account. This is a *real and living hope*. Mourn and grieve we may on All Souls' Day, but this day is chiefly about our hope in the resurrection. We may not find the intellectual power or the depth of faith to understand, know or even believe in what happens after death, but one thing we can be sure of: *God loves us*. God loves us so much that he cries and bleeds and dies for our sake. A god who is infinitely loving, and infinitely merciful, so much so that he sacrifices himself for us, such a god wants the very best for all his children who he has redeemed by his blood. 'And this is the will of him who sent me,' says Jesus in our gospel reading, 'that I should lose *nothing* of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.'

And so we come this evening rightly mourning and grieving for those we have loved and lost. But the sadness we feel is incomparable with the joys prepared for those for whom we mourn. So this evening we come also to celebrate: to celebrate the hope of resurrection, the hope of immortality, the hope, ultimately, of *love*. The love of God, which transcends even the love we have for those who have died. A love which never ends, never wavers, never disappoints. A love so strong that death can never be nothing at all.