

ALL SOULS DAY 2016

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. 1 John 3.2

In 1944 Lord Quickswood, as he retired from being Provost of Eton, gathered the boys around him to say goodbye. 'Most of my predecessors', he said, 'have left here to go to heaven. I, however, am going to Bournemouth'. And so he did, at least for his penultimate stop. It was said of the old people of Bournemouth 'they came here to die and then forgot what they came for'. Perhaps it's more fair to say, that like so many of us, they blotted death from their minds. It is difficult to contemplate death, especially our own.

However, every time we say the Lord's Prayer – Thy will be done – we are surrendering to God. Each time we come to receive Holy Communion and hold out our hands we are surrendering to God, to God's love, and seeking to be transformed into the likeness of God. Each time we lie down at night to sleep, we give God back the day we have spent; we surrender ourselves to sleep under God's protection. When we come to death it is the final of a sequence of many surrenders, however incomplete they have been: 'Father into your hands I commend my spirit'.

When loved ones die, when we love some one precious to us, something within us dies too. In our sorrow we have to try hand that life back to God, who gave the gift of life. Our loved one dies into God. As grievous and as agonising as the parting is it is not outside God's love, but contained within it. The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ show us that loss cannot hold us for ever in its grasp. Our loved ones are held within God's love.

'Death hides, but it does not divide-
Thou art but on Christ's other side;
Thou art with Christ, and Christ with me
In Him I still am close to thee.'

For us the closeness is at its greatest in the celebration of the Mass, when heaven and earth are mysteriously united. In Christ we are one with God.

St Cyprian and St Cornelius had a very close friendship. They made a promise to one another that whichever should die first would remember in prayer the one left behind:

"Let us be mutually mindful of each other, let us ever pray for each other, and ... let our love continue in the presence of the Lord, let not prayer for our brethren and sisters cease in the presence of the mercy of the Father"

This evening, All Soulstide, as we remember family and friends who have died 'let our love continue in the presence of the Lord'. As we pray for them and remember them we pray that the good work which God began in them may be completed and perfected; and that in Christ, we with them may find our true and highest good. By his grace may be one in him, and all made like him and attain the vision of his glory. Amen