

All Souls' Day - Sunday 2nd November 2025

Today's Bible Readings

First Reading Wisdom 3: 1-9

Gospel John 6: 37-40

Homily *"I will raise them up on the last day." John 6: 40*

We have been having a debate at home about family photographs. The children love having them out on display in frames, and showing them off, so I thought it would be great to buy one of those digital frames, so twenty or so photos could rotate. I have missed the point! It is about being able to hold the photo and then relate the story that goes with it – silly me!

Holding onto things that are important to us is very human. Recalling events, occasions, holidays, places that are special to us, and the people we associate with them matters. Individuals may form these attachments throughout their lifetimes. For my children a photograph, in a frame does just that, it solidifies their attachment and helps them to place themselves into their own story and that of others. This is important for our family.

The Church community is also a family and All Souls Day, known also as the Commemoration of the Faithful departed, is all about our attachments and remembering those who have died, who have been important to us and our lives. Grandparents, parents, children, brothers and sisters, friends, and neighbours – all people who have left their mark on our world, our lives. Today is celebrated worldwide with various traditions. In South America, particularly Mexico, All Saints

and then All Souls Day are celebrated as the day of the dead. We may get this confused with Halloween, but it is all about family and friends gathering to pay respects and remember those who have died. These celebrations can take a humorous tone, as celebrants remember amusing events and anecdotes about the departed – people reflect upon their attachments, and it is an extremely healthy thing to do.

In the Church of England, the 4-week Kingdom season includes festivals for commemoration. Next Sunday is Remembrance, reminding us that love transcends death and that remembrance is an act of faith – bringing into the present that which matters from the past and remembering that God chooses to work through people, to change lives through people, to be present through people.

Today in Church we use purple hangings and vestments to reflect our prayers for our loved one's past, and our hope that by God's grace they will share with the saints in the joys of God's heavenly kingdom. Purple also signifies forgiveness and preparation – we will use purple in church throughout Advent, yes just 4 weeks from today, as we prepare for Christmas. Preparation for heaven is very much the theme of today's bible readings and prayers because our attachments matter.

The Wisdom of Solomon very much supports the belief in more than just the here and now, that there is eternal life and that heaven is open to all. Wisdom offers up her truth, that the souls of the just are in the hand of the Lord where no torment can touch them, where pain, suffering and separation are no more.

The Gospel today is full of reassurance that those in the family portrait will find a place in heaven. John's Gospel is alive with the promise of eternal life, with Jesus promising that anyone who comes to him he will never drive away. For he himself is the Resurrection, the bright promise of life. So much so he will raise them up on the last day. That offer is there for our loved ones departed and it is there for us too, that we may be part of the picture.

For in his death and Resurrection, Jesus has conquered death for all those who believe in him – and that includes those whose faith is known to God alone. Through Jesus, God who knows us and loves us, has made a way for all to travel to be part of the kingdom of love, joy, and peace.

Holding onto things that are important to us is very human. I love looking at photos of my grandparents, remembering fun times and experiences together – they were incredibly special to me. Like my children, I love spending time looking at pictures and remembering – they help connect me to my journey and my attachments.

Our loved ones departed do and should matter to us – they are part of the picture of our own lives and journey. As Christians, we believe that we continue to share a relationship with those who have died, that there is more than there here and now, and when we gather to worship, to pause, to pray, and especially break the bread of communion, heaven and earth draw ever so close. That is the faith that I offer today.

When you look at photos of the loved ones, remember the journey you took together and just perhaps, find a way to take something from that and help it to live on in and through

you. Just as God longs to fill your life with love, healing and peace, and live through you too – just as God longs to form a deep attachment with each one of us called faith. It takes time, it needs nurturing, but it does wonders for the journey!

‘Tis a fearful thing
To love
What death can touch.
To love, to hope, to dream,
And oh, to lose.
A thing for fools, this,
Love,
But a holy thing,
To love what death can touch.

For your life has lived in me;
Your laugh once lifted me;
Your word was a gift to me.
To remember this brings painful joy.
‘Tis a human thing, love,
A holy thing,
To love
What death can touch.

Judah Halevi or Emanuel of Rome – 12th Century.

Amen.

Fr Damian Harrison-Miles, November 2025.