

The Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (All Souls) (Cycle B) November 2, 2012 -- Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.

At Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, just across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, the members of the 3rd US Infantry Regiment of the United States Army . . . the "Old Guard" . . . maintain a perpetual honor guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns. The inscription on the west side of the tomb reads,

"Here rests in Honored Glory an American Soldier known but to God."

Those who sleep there were taken from us in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. We will never know who they are.

The members of the Old Guard have stood their posts 24 hours a day, seven days a week, since 1937. They have been given permission to stand down a number of times during severe inclement weather events, but they have chosen to remain in place. They have kept faith with those whose tombs they guard. Since 1937.

The weather in Memphis has been fairly mild for the last few weeks. But as we all know, a great storm has struck the northeastern United States. But the Old Guard has remained faithful, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They do not know whose tombs they guard. But they remain in place, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Today we commemorate those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, whose names are not known to us. We celebrate the victory of Christ over death. God has destroyed death forever, has wiped away the tears from every cheek. We are about to receive the Eucharist, the bread of life, a foretaste of life with God after death.

Death has been overcome. The fundamental reality of human existence is that we must die, even as our souls thirst for immortality.

Sometimes death seems to us to be absurd, illogical, incomprehensible. The young, the innocent are sometimes taken from us . . . death comes unexpectedly, randomly, seemingly on the threshold of a wonderful future. We who are left suffer desperation and anguish and grief.

But we know that death is the doorway to new life. The risen Christ destroyed death, and we all have already begun to overcome death by participating in his Resurrection.

We all prepare to take our places in the pantheon of the faithful departed whose names are unknown to us. This morning we receive the Body of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, and receive a foretaste of the glory of heaven. We grow in life, the new life of Christ.

We all hope for what we do not yet have. The goal of Christian hope is to reach heaven with God's help once our earthly life is over.

I remember one of the old "Batman" episodes in which Batman and Robin narrowly escape some horrible cataclysm, and Robin says,

"Golly, Batman, we could have been killed!"

And Batman responds,

"Or worse."

When I first heard it, I thought it was funny. But now I realize that Batman was right. Death is not the worst thing that can happen. Those who lack faith may think so, because they see death as a doorway to nothingness. We look at death differently. Death is not the annihilation of being but the gateway to a new way of being and living forever.

Our Bishop and our priests celebrate the Eucharist at Calvary Cemetery today. Christian cemeteries are places of hope, places in which our longing for eternity rises to God. Death is not the worst of all evils. The greatest evil is the decision to reject the will of God, which we call sin. It's a choice we all have to make.

Those we commemorate today chose eternal life. Their names are not known to us. But we stand guard at their tombs this day.

Readings

Reading 1 Wis 3:1-9

The souls of the just are in the hand of God,
and no torment shall touch them.
They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead;
and their passing away was thought an affliction
and their going forth from us, utter destruction.
But they are in peace.
For if before men, indeed, they be punished,
yet is their hope full of immortality;
chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed,
because God tried them
and found them worthy of himself.
As gold in [the furnace](#), he proved them,
and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself.
In the time of their visitation they shall shine,
and shall dart about as sparks through stubble;
they shall judge nations and rule over peoples,
and [the LORD](#) shall be their King forever.
Those who trust in him shall understand truth,
and the faithful shall abide with him in love:
because grace and mercy are with his holy ones,
and his care is with his elect.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

or:

R. Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In verdant pastures he gives me repose;

beside restful waters he leads me;

he refreshes my soul.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

or:

R. Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.

He guides me in right paths

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk in the dark valley

I fear no evil; for you are at my side

with your rod and your staff

that give me courage.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

or:

R. Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.

You spread the table before me

in the sight of my foes;

You anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

or:

R. Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.

Only goodness and kindness follow me

all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

or:

R. Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.

Reading 2 Rom 6:3-9

Brothers and sisters:

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?

We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death,
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
we too might live in newness of life.

For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his,
we shall also be united with him in the resurrection.

We know that our old self was crucified with him,
so that our sinful body might be done away with,
that we might no longer be in slavery to sin.

For a dead person has been absolved from sin.

If, then, we have died with Christ,
we believe that we shall also live with him.

We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more;
death no longer has power over him.

Gospel Jn 6:37-40

Jesus said to the crowds:

"Everything that the Father gives me will come to me,
and I will not reject anyone who comes to me,
because I came down from heaven not to do my own will
but the will of the one who sent me.

And this is the will of the one who sent me,
that I should not lose anything of what he gave me,
but that I should raise it on the last day.

For this is the will of my Father,
that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him
may have eternal life,
and I shall raise him on the last day."