

Mass at St Mary's Cemetery

September 8, 2018

Being here this morning brings back memories of loved ones. Today we wish to remember them all on this the 100th anniversary of St. Mary's Cemetery.

The book of Maccabees tells us that "it is good and holy thought to pray for the dead." To pray for the repose of the souls of those who have died is truly a gesture of love. "The mere fact of turning toward God, approaching him in faith and love, means that all the people we carry in our hearts, and even those who, without our knowing it, are linked to us by a thousand invisible but real threads of the Communion of Saints, are also "automatically" brought closer to God and benefit from it [Jacques Philippe, *Thirsting for Prayer*, p. 66]. As we remember them in prayer, there is a healing and a peace that comes to us. Prayer is never wasted.

Here at St. Mary's Cemetery we are outnumbered by "the silent majority." The truth is that those who have gone before us are not silent. We may no longer hear them, but their voices are not silent before God. They pray for us and for our eternal salvation and their prayers are heard by God. This is one of the great consolations of believing in the Communion of Saints.

Faith teaches us quite clearly and succinctly that when we die, life is changed, not ended. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote these words in a poem entitled *A Psalm of Life*: "Life is real! Life is earnest! And the grave is not its goal; dust thou art, to dust returnest was never spoken of the soul." Bodies die, but the soul is immortal. The writer of the Book of Wisdom tells us that "The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God."

Faith teaches us that the final destiny of the human body is not to be reduced to ashes that lie in the grave, but to be raised up from the dead and clothed with the incorruptibility patterned on the glorious body of the risen Jesus himself and to share in the eternal happiness of the angels and saints in heaven. If this is so, how then should we live so as to attain it?

Jesus shows us how by his words and his example. Jesus called those who would listen to change their lives. One reaps what one sows. If you want your spiritual life to flourish, think of it as a beautiful garden. Get rid of the weeds. Strive to enter by the narrow door. Don't always choose the easy way. It is better to suffer for doing what is

good than for doing evil. Don't take things for granted. Always be grateful. Don't make a pretense of being religious by going through the motions. Strive for true holiness. Hold no grudges. Forgive and let go. Don't put others down. Pray for them. Don't be afraid. Trust in God and trust in me. Live in peace. Love one another. Pray unceasingly for the strength to endure all that is going to happen. This is living virtuously! This is living victoriously over the grave.

St. John of the Cross said that "In the evening of life we shall be judged on love." Like love itself, all the good deeds that we do that are inspired by love live on and become part of the great joy that is ours to possess for all eternity. Whatever is done with love is never lost. Love is never wasted. Much of human life is struggle, suffering and sorrows. Inspired by love, we can do much to alleviate the suffering of our world and make it a better place. The monk Jacques Philippe writes, "Only the madness of charity can get to the bottom of evil..... Only an excess of love can save the world" [Jacques Philippe, *The Eight Doors to the Kingdom*, p. 114f].

Christians are not only people of faith and love. We are also people of hope. St. Paul tells us, "Hope does not disappoint" [Romans 5, 5]. Hope recognizes that "I am small and poor before God, but I confidently expect everything from him. And therefore my poverty is not a problem, but a stroke of good luck" [Jacques Philippe, *Thirsting for Prayer*, p. 52]. "This is the most consoling idea of all. By hope, we can, quite certainly, obtain everything from God" [Ibid, 55].

Many of those we remember today lived saintly lives. The Church needs saints today. The Church needs holy men and women who fiercely and courageously resist the soul killing culture of atheism, materialism, greed, pleasure and other addictions.

Some 50 years ago in a radio show, a very young Father Ratzinger, when asked about his predictions for the Church of the future, responded: The future of the Church can and will issue from those whose roots are deep and who live from the pure fullness of their faith..... The future of the Church, once again as always, will be reshaped by the saints, by men [and women], that is, whose minds probe deeper than the slogans of the day, who see more than others see, because their lives embrace a wider reality. Unselfishness, which makes men free, is attained only through the practice of small daily acts of self-denial.... If today we are scarcely able any longer to become aware of God, that is because we find it so easy to evade ourselves, to flee from the depths of our being by means of the narcotic of some pleasure or other."

“Few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet, it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change a world which yields most painfully to change” [Robert F. Kennedy, 1966]. So, friends, what are we being offered today? “A new world, if we are willing to take it” [Col. Philip Corso].

As we pray for our loved ones today, let us pray for the Church, for ourselves, too. We face some very serious challenges. God help us!

Father Neil