**Mass for Deceased Clergy and Religious 2022**

**28th November 2022**

November, the month of the Holy Souls, begins with the celebration of All Saints. The saints are our inspiration as we strive to live as followers of Christ. A saint, who can be an inspiration for us tonight, is St Catherine of Siena; she constantly challenged the Church of her day, to be Christian not only in word, but also in deed.

As we remember our departed clergy, and departed religious men and women, this key question arises, “What motivated them to live as they did?” In asking this question, we are, of course, asking it of ourselves as well. Strangely, an answer is to be found in a text for the Mass for the Dead, which is misleadingly translated, but which now, unintentionally, becomes a “felix culpa”, a happy fault! It is that special remembrance for the dead inserted into the Eucharistic Prayer, which reads, “Remember your servants whom you have called from this world to yourself. Grant that they who were united with your Son in a death like his, may also be one with him in his Resurrection”. The phrase “in a death like his” is misleading, as it would seem to suggest that the deceased have died by crucifixion. However, setting this objection aside, the prayer allows us to focus our attention on that which lies at the heart of the Lord’s crucifixion, - unbounded love which did not count death too high a price to pay.

St Catherine of Siena, reflecting on the Lord’s sacrifice, wrote these extraordinary words: “The Cross would not have been enough to hold him, nor the earth enough to keep the Cross upright, nor the nails enough to keep him nailed fast to the Cross, unless love had held him there first!” *(Letter T).* Tonight, we remember our deceased brothers and sisters, and while acknowledging their human frailty, and praying for the forgiveness of their sins, we also give thanks to God that they were held fast in their vocations by love – it was love that was their motivation – love for their Lord expressed as love for the Church, and as love for God’s people.

As we remember them, we each must ask, “What holds me fast in my calling?” The Lord, from the Cross, gazes upon us with open arms, inviting us to welcome his boundless love, and in doing so, to share it with others. Pope Francis said recently, *“*Jesus, naked on the Cross, unveils God……..let us look to him and thus find the courage to look at ourselves, to follow the path of confident trust and intercession, and to make servants of ourselves” *(Feast of Christ the King, 2022).*

St Catherine of Siena described the Cross as “the book of life”, a text written, not with ink, but with blood and with such large letters that all can read it easily. The twentieth century Czech author, Franz Kafka, suggested that a book must be the axe that breaks the frozen sea within us. Attentive reading of that which is the greatest love story ever told must surely shatter the ice in our hearts! St Catherine once had a vision of Jesus coming to her and taking, from out of her side, her physical heart, then giving her a new heart, saying to her; “Dearest Daughter....I took your heart....now, I am giving you mine, so that you can go on living with it forever.”The Prophet Ezekiel says something similar: *“I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you” (Ez.36:26).*

The words of Ezekiel, and those of St Catherine, bring home to us the realisation that the deepest meaning of Christian discipleship is not working for the Lord but being with the Lord. St John Henry Newman put it even more succinctly – “heart speaks unto heart”. To gaze upon the Cross, to be one with the pierced heart of Jesus, is the calling of all Christians, but particularly so of priests and religious. A deep desire for personal holiness keeps our calling in focus, otherwise the apostolate becomes joyless and barren, and we are seized by an inner weariness, a weariness which Pope Benedict XV1 has referred to as “the grey pragmatism of the daily life of the Church, in which all appears to proceed normally, while in reality faith is wearing down” *(EG 83).*

As clergy and religious we are naturally challenged by the decrease of vocations, by the increase in the age profile, as well as by the growing secularization of society, nevertheless, with love-filled hearts we will not grow faint. The prophet, in Morning Prayer of Friday Week 2, declares:

*“For even though the fig tree does not blossom,*

*nor the fruit grow on the vine,*

*even though the olive crop fail,*

*and the fields produce no harvest,*

*even though flocks vanish from the folds*

*and cattle stalls stand empty of cattle,*

*yet I will rejoice in the Lord*

*and exult in God my saviour.” (Hab.3:15-19)*

St Catherine of Siena asserted, “You are rewarded not according to your work or your time but according to the measure of your love”; St Paul declared, *“without love, then I am nothing at all”.* Just as our departed brothers and sisters were held fast in their vocation by love, so may love enable us “*to endure whatever comes.”*

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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