

Commemoration of the Faithful Departed

St Thomas Episcopal Church (in Columbarium)

November 2, 2020

Rev. Dr. Sandy McCann

When Grace invited me to give the homily on this day of remembering and celebrating the faithful departed, she said she thought it might be meaningful to me since I knew so many of the folks who were buried here in this space. There are 98 names on this wall with the last 2 not yet added. Since 1983, 100 people have been buried here. And Grace was right. Yesterday I came to read the names on the wall of those buried here. It was a very emotional experience. I knew sixty of them. Founding members, choir members, readers, ushers, teachers, craftsmen, altar guild members, priests, young people and family of our members. There is Betty Nixdorf with whom I taught third and fourth grade SS class for years; Tom Thompson who taught my four-year course in Education for Ministry and along with Tom's name are those of Gene Holcomb and Jim Fletcher who also took the course. There is Max Burr and Walker and Jane Rivers, all physicians with whom I practiced. Now none of these people listed on this wall are world famous saints, but all of their souls, whether doctors or priests or victims of suicide, are precious in God's sight.

Today, All Souls Day, we will read aloud the names of the dead that we remember and for whom we give thanks for their witness and continuing influence on our lives. Yesterday I was reminded of the power of remembering names. A flood of memories washed over me. This wall of names is our Vietnam Memorial. But the names on this wall are not from a war that was lost. This is a victory wall.

The German theologian Dorothee Soelle wrote, *Christians are those whose death is already behind them.* Because in Jesus' death and resurrection, death has been defeated. Death does not have the final say. After our deaths, the author of Colossians tells us, our lives are hidden in Christ with God. Death then is simply a transition from earthly life to eternal life in God.

We especially feel the thin place between this earthly life and the life that is to come in this space, where we see the names of those who now make up that great cloud of witnesses that surround us on every side. It is why our funeral mass is an Easter liturgy where we celebrate the Eucharist, trusting that our loved one is now one of the witnesses surrounding us and joining us at the table.

Our Eucharist is a foretaste of that heavenly banquet described in today's passage from Isaiah: *On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death for ever.* (Isa 25: 6-7)

So, while this temporary world is one in which there is suffering and death, the eternal world is one in which death has been swallowed up. It is for this eternal life where we are hidden in Christ for which we Christians hope for it is where *the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.* (Isa 25:8-9)

So, in this waiting time between our earthly home and our heavenly home, we give thanks for those souls that continue to witness to us. Let us honor them by continuing the good work they have begun. Let us continue to be the true church that cares about the souls of all people, especially the souls of those who mourn, the souls of the poor and the poor in spirit, the souls of the immigrants and the prisoners, the souls of those who are hungry. Let us provide for them a Thanksgiving Feast as described in Isaiah (cha 55):

*Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.*

Amen.

And now May the God of hope fill “us” with all joy and peace as “we” trust in Him, so that “we” may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15.13)