



Contributed by Father Paul S. Voisin, C.R.

Father Paul is a Waterloo native, was ordained to the priesthood as a Resurrectionist on May 14, 1977. He has served in pastoral ministry in Kitchener and Brantford, Ontario, education and pastoral ministry in La Paz, and formation and pastoral ministry in Cochabamba, Bolivia. He served as Provincial Superior of the Ontario-Kentucky Province from 2005 to 2008. He is presently the Vicar General of the Diocese of Hamilton in Bermuda, and Rector of St. Theresa's Cathedral.

November 2, 2014
All Souls' Day

GATHERING TIME (10-15 minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

There are many things in our life that influence our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about death. Perhaps our first 'encounter' with death may influence future 'encounters'. As I reflect on my own life, I have a vivid memory of the death of my maternal grandfather when I was six years of age. This is one of my first childhood recollections, because it was significant. I remember that he was 'waked' at home, in their home in Formosa, Ontario. The casket was in the small parlour, a room which (I admit) I never felt the same about afterward. I can remember, in the adjoining kitchen, a circle of chairs filled with relatives and friends. I recall my grandmother wanting me to come to her, and me not wanting to go to her. At that young age I was surely confused with the whole reality that I did not really understand at that tender age. I was really like a fish out of water. A saving feature of the experience—upon reflection—was that I remember it as very much a family-centred experience. It was peaceful, but new and somewhat confusing.

Perhaps each of you can recall your first 'encounter' with death, and the positive (or at least neutral) or negative memories it conjures up. Some may even use the word 'traumatic' to describe it. Often, as a priest, I have seen these positive or negative memories greatly influence family members dealing with the loss of a loved one. Whereas for some it is a part of life, for others a visit to a funeral home, a cemetery, or attending a funeral are to be avoided at all cost.

As we celebrate All Souls' Day this year, falling on a Sunday, we have an opportunity to look at this reality of death (and eternal life) without the presence of a casket, outside of the context of a funeral liturgy. That does not happen often, so let us make use of it.

God's Word speaks to us so beautifully on this feast about the reality of death and eternal life. Just as we cannot truly appreciate and understand Easter Sunday without experiencing Good Friday, so we cannot truly appreciate and understand the resurrection without reflecting on physical death.

Warm-Up Activity: (about 8-10 minutes)

Take a few moments to reflect on your own experience of death and loss. Do you remember your first ‘encounter’ with death? What do you remember? How has it affected your present day ‘encounters’ with death? Share your memories and reflections, to the extent that you are comfortable.

Then, look at the same reality in a spiritual context. As we have grown and matured in our faith life, how have our initial thoughts, feelings and experiences of death changed? Have we ‘moved beyond’ that initial ‘encounter’? How has our experience opened us up to the resurrection? Please share, to the extent that you are comfortable, about this growing ‘moving beyond’ death to resurrection and new life.

The Table of the Word

Life is changed, not ended

In one of the Prefaces for Funeral Liturgies we hear that *“life is changed, not ended”*. This is our faith! All Souls’ Day is not a day to be overcome with the loss of our dearly departed loved ones, relatives and friends (however long ago it was), but it can and should be an opportunity to reflect on the new and risen life that our faithful departed now share in the kingdom of God. Our tears diminish and peace consoles us, and with time joy is ours—joy at knowing that our loved ones are with the Risen Lord.

As Christians our faith in the resurrection is central. We are an Easter people, and our lives should reflect that ‘Alleluia,’ that bursting into new life with Christ. We are called to share in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus—the suffering, death, resurrection and ascension. This is the path of Jesus to new and eternal life, and it is our path, too. Jesus wants to raise us up, as he was raised by the Father to the glory of heaven.

The Christian virtue most associated with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is hope. Hope is the Charism of the Resurrectionist Community. That one word announces who we are and what we are about. It should actually describe each and every Christian, imbued with the spirit of the Risen Christ. The resurrection proclaims the power of God to go beyond the impossible and the improbable. The disciples had no idea on Good Friday that there would be an Easter Sunday, that Jesus would rise from the dead. There are times in our own lives when God has also done the impossible and the probable. This is the source of our hope! These experiences of resurrection and new life have opened us up to the power of God, and allowed us to move forward in circumstances when our initial reaction was to retreat, when all seemed hopeless and without remedy, when all seemed dark and destined to fail. With this intimate and personal experience of resurrection, All Souls’ Day becomes a day to celebrate the new life of our dearly departed, and the life that awaits each of us one day.

Leader: “I shall raise them on the last day”.

Lord Jesus, you give us life and call us to spiritual life with you, **Lord, have mercy.**

Christ Jesus, you lead us to a deeper understanding of eternal life, **Christ have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you raise us up at the hour of our death. **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray (together):

**Listen kindly to our prayers, O Lord,
and, as our faith in your Son, raised from the dead,
is deepened, so may our hope of resurrection for your departed servants
also find new strength.**

**Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for every and ever. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(As Christians we believe that the WORD of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely reflecting on our life-story within the context of the Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving.)

Traditionally there have been various readings provided for this day. The Living Liturgy Sunday Missal we have in our pews in Bermuda gives three alternate sets of readings. I have chosen the following, which may vary from what you will hear in your parish community on Sunday.

FIRST READING (Wisdom 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 his 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.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (Romans 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.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (John 6:37-40)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

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.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

COMMENTARY:

The First Reading, from the Book of Wisdom, is one of my favourites for funeral Masses. I love the image of “*the souls of the just in the hands of God,*” an image of tenderness and closeness. Indeed, that is where we are, intimately linked to God. Despite the appearance to the eyes of the world of being forsaken or forgotten, it is just the contrary - we are taken up with God. We who know the truth know that this separation from earthly life and from us their entrance into a deeper life with God. They have been “*tested*” and “*found worthy*” of this eternal life. Sorrow should be pushed aside, and we should glory in the victory that is ours for a life well lived in union with God.

Our Second Reading, from St. Paul to the Romans, emphasizes the connection in Christian theology between Baptism and physical death. In our Baptism we ‘die’ to a life without God and without grace, and are reborn into a rich life of grace and in intimate union with God. The white garment at Baptism is a sign of that new life. In the early Church, during adult Baptisms, the candidate for the Sacrament was often prostrate and a white cloth put over them to symbolize their death, and then the cloth was removed and the person ‘rose’ to new life. That is why the funeral pall, used in most Catholic funeral celebrations, is so important.

Our Gospel also speaks of the intimate union with God, and how, through Jesus, that bond of love has been renewed, secured and deepened. For our union with Christ, our faithfulness to the Father’s will, we are ‘raised up’ to eternal life. If we believe in this, we cannot mourn without end for our loved ones who have died, because they are now sharing in the eternal life God promised them—with no more pain and sorrow, no more injections or treatments. Perhaps we mourn more for ourselves, the tears of sorrow reflecting our loss of the dear one and the hole that is in our lives without them. On All Souls’ Day we should not be looking back with sorrow to our loss, thinking of the funeral rites, but looking forward to the future, recognizing how our loved one would want us to live and continue on our path to that same eternal destiny. Then, we will truly be people of hope, and understand, appreciate, and express the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

This commemoration of our deceased should fill us with hope for them—united with God—and for ourselves and our loved ones here with us. We are still pilgrims, on our way to the Father. We are still in need of grace and blessing, of peace and reconciliation, of love and compassion, of justice and consolation. Their ‘battle’ is over, but our ‘battle’ continues, our battle against sin and evil, against apathy and hatred, against indifference and desperation, against hopelessness and fear. All Souls’ Day cannot only be about the souls of the faithful departed, but about our souls which continue to need nurturing and being held “*in the hands of God*” until we are united, after our earthly journey, with God in his kingdom.

If we know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, as St. Paul speaks of in his Letter to the Philippians (3:10), we should not fear death, but we should recognize how our life will “*change*” (“*not end*”). It is easy for most people to glory in All Saints’ Day, rejoicing in the holy saints who have “gone before us with the sign of faith,” already victorious over sin and death, and All Souls’ Day which still finds some people languishing in sorrow and uncertainty. We are certain,

and assured by God—as in our beautiful readings we shared today—that “*life is changed, not ended*”.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. (Wisdom 3:1-9) “*the souls of the just are in the hand of God*”
 - a) Do I feel that I am “*in the hand of God*”? How would I describe it to someone?
 - b) How have I been “*tested*” and “*found worthy*”?
 - c) What have been experiences for me of the Paschal Mystery? Am I conscious of having “*died*” and “*been raised up*” by God?

2. (Romans 6:3-9) “*We too might live in newness of life*”
 - a) How have we experienced “*newness of life*” in our own life?
 - b) How has the Paschal Mystery been revealed to us in our own life? Is it more than just a notion or concept?
 - c) What do I believe about this “*newness of life*” for my dear departed ones?

3. (John 6:37-40) “*I shall raise them up*”
 - a) How have I felt “*raised up*” by God?
 - b) How do I believe my faithful departed have been “*raised up*”? To what?
 - c) Do I believe that my union with Christ has assured me of this resurrection and new life?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to ‘outreach’ to the larger community. The facilitator should allow for a moderate pause between each of the numbered suggestions for reflection and action.)

1. Word of the Week: “*Life is changed, not ended*”

2. Suggestion for the week: re follow—up

Let us take some time this week to reflect on death and resurrection—without becoming morbid and overcome with emotion. Rather, may our reflection give us hope, that virtue most associated with the resurrection. After all, that should be the end result of our celebration of All Souls’ Day: renewed hope and joy for our faithful departed (and for ourselves too). We cannot allow ourselves to be overcome with our experiences of death and loss without balancing it with our faith in the resurrection and eternal life. We cannot remain in Good Friday, without passing to Easter Sunday.

i) Take some time this week to reflect on the loss of at least one of your family members or dearest friends. What would be their wish for you, in relation to this ‘separation’ from you? Perhaps it would be helpful to share this reflection with another person who misses this deceased person. You might be surprised by their thoughts.

ii) Pray for the eternal rest of your dear ones who have gone to be with God. Imagine them in the kingdom of peace and joy.

iii) Reflect, and share (with someone important to you), on how your thoughts, feelings and convictions about death and resurrection have grown during this reflection.

3. **Intercessions**

Leader: Believing that God is with us, that we the living are also in “*the hand of God,*” let us bring our prayers and petitions to the Lord of life.

1. For a renewed sense of the virtue of hope in each of us, and in our Church, that we may share it with the world, we pray ...

2. For our faithful departed, whose names we share now (to the extent that you feel comfortable) ... that they may share fully in the risen life of the Lord Jesus, we pray ...

3. For all those who have died in witnessing to the faith, especially those modern-day martyrs in Africa and the Middle East, that the joy of heaven may be theirs, we pray ...

4. For those who mourn without hope, that a renewed faith in the resurrection of Jesus will give them peace and consolation, we pray ...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

**Let us pray (together):
Grant we pray, O Lord,
that your departed servants,
faithful to you on their earthly pilgrimage,
may pass over to a dwelling place of light and peace,
through Christ our Lord,**

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God’s favour on us today, we pray that all those in our influence may be moved to be open to that new life that awaits us in the resurrection, while we pray:

OUR FATHER ...

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. ([Celebrating the Word](#) was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., now deceased). For information or subscriptions: Toll Free: 1-877-242-7935. Email: theword@celebratingtheword.com

Website: www.resurrectionists.com (click on Ministries for CTW info.) Scripture version used in this commentary is the [New Revised Standard Version](#) (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).