**Reflection – For Sunday 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 6th November 2022**

At this time of year, we should always remember Armistice Day. On 11th November 1918, the guns fell silent in the trenches of the Western Front to end the First World War - the war that was supposed to end all wars. A great-great Uncle of mine, Herbert William Brooks, still lies buried in Belgium. He was only 19 when he was killed. The distance between the dead and the living really isn’t as great as we may think it is. Death is just another stage in the journey of life, an experience that is as universal as it is unique to the individual. The dead are just as much a part of our lives as those who are still with us. To the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure. In the words of William Penn: They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it. Death cannot kill what never dies.

If only the minds of the Sadducees were as well-organized as that of Jesus! In our Gospel, a group of Sadducees try to insult his intelligence with an argument as nonsensical as it is deliberately loaded to discredit him. The Sadducees were sad you see because they didn’t believe in the resurrection. A man dies childless leaving a widow. His brothers, all six of them, die in turn after marrying the same woman to continue the family name according to the Law of Moses. Which one of them will she be married to at the resurrection since she had been married to all seven? Having a lot of kids (preferably sons) was seen as a way of achieving an immortality of sorts beyond death. The quibble they conjure up seeks to make belief in life after death ridiculous, resting on the crass assumption that life after death will simply be a repetition or extension of this present life as we know it. By challenging their wrongheadedness, Jesus fulfils the hope of a heroic mother and her seven sons in 2 Maccabees who martyr themselves rather than disobey the Dietary laws of their ancestors. In the light of the Gospel, physical death is not the end of life but the beginning of a whole new state of existence where the giving and receiving of human love will be replaced by an eternal life of love beyond all telling, in which all relationships of love have their origin. Like the bush that Moses saw in the desert that was ablaze but not consumed, our souls will one day have to pass through the healing, purifying fires of Purgatory for a time to be transformed and reborn to come into God’s presence. For Jesus and for us in the light of the Gospel, God is not the God of the dead but of the living. For to him all are in fact alive.

Just as in the time of the Sadducees, many today tend to sanitise and/or deny the reality of death altogether. Nevertheless, the experience of Covid has shown us the fragile beauty of life. In the face of life’s impermanence, it is no longer good enough to live on a purely superficial level without meaning. Our ways of celebrating the gift of life and ritualising the moment of death at life’s natural end fulfil a need as old as humanity itself. As we begin this month of prayer for the Holy Souls all we can do is journey in sure and certain hope as Paul does in II Thessalonians. For those who turn their hearts towards the love of God to live with the fortitude of Christ, life is changed, not ended. Through Jesus, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob binds us together not only with those who have gone before us but also with those who will come after us. With the Psalmist we shall see God’s face and be filled, when we awake from the sleep of death, with the sight of God’s glory. Those we have loved and lost through physical death will be children of the resurrection. For death cannot kill what never dies…

As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI writes in his Letter on Christian Hope, “Spe Salvi”:

*To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality—this we can only attempt. It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time—the before and after—no longer exists. We can only attempt to grasp the idea that such a moment is life in the full sense, a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy.*