
Sermon for All Saints Requiem

A sermon by the Rev. Canon Cathy Zappa
All Saints' Sunday – Year C

Sacrifices and prayers of praise to thee, O Lord, we offer. Receive them, on behalf of those souls whom we remember today. [\[i\]](#)

No one here is a stranger to death. And we bring with us, into this gathering and liturgy, all kinds of experiences around it, and all the questions and emotions that follow death, and linger, for months and years. We bring those open spaces in our lives where someone we love used to be. We bring our own fear of death, our longing for God, and our hope in resurrection. And we gather all this together and offer it to God and one another, uniting our prayer today with the prayers of the faithful throughout time: *Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.* [\[ii\]](#)

One of the challenges of grief is that it can be so isolating. At times, it would have us believe that we're all alone, that no one really understands. And it can persecute us with guilt and regret and self-doubt, which can drive us further away from others.

In these ways and others, death threatens to be the great divide, this great separator. It threatens to separate not just the living from the dead, but also the grieving from the happy world around them—to separate us from each other, or from the God we thought we knew and the faith we thought we had before.

But today, we answer that threat of isolation—that illusion of separation—with communion. If you feel like you're alone, look around you. Reach out. Listen to this music. Pray these prayers that have been cried and whispered and sung across time and around the world: *Merciful Lord Jesus, grant them rest eternal.* [\[iii\]](#)

A few years ago, I was sitting right there, officiating an evensong service, just a couple weeks after the untimely and complicated death of a dear friend of mine. I was still stunned, and thinking about how to put words around the mysteries of death and life and grief—trying to pray my way back into trusting, really trusting, God and the promises of my faith. To make matters worse, perhaps because my mind was elsewhere, I'd just made a big mistake and was chastising myself for it, when the choir started singing.

And I had a mystical experience. I was enveloped with this consoling and tingly sense of peace and company, and I knew that my friend was somehow still present, and at peace—and that I would be too. It was like the music, the liturgy, the Holy Spirit itself, had anticipated and expressed my unspoken questions and fears, and answered.

I return to this moment often, when I need to remember the hope of my faith and the greatness of God's power over sin and death—when I need to remember that at death, life is changed, not ended.

And I offer it to you, because we all want peace for those we have loved and lost. Indeed, our own peace often depends on the assurance of theirs. Sometimes, the spirit blesses us with an unmistakable sign of this assurance, praying in us and offering an unexpected consolation, a moment of peace or connection. Other times, in the midst of our deepest darkness and anguish, we have to rely on the stories of others—the stories of those who have found light in darkness, fellowship in loneliness, life in death, communion with the dead.

This is one of the great gifts of this requiem mass, and it seems to be what Maurice Duruflé himself intended. “This requiem,” he says, “is not an ethereal work which sings of detachment from human concerns. It reflects, in the unchanging form of Christian prayer, the anguish of man faced with the mystery of his final end. . . . It tries to translate the human feeling in front of this destiny that can seem, at once, terrifying, inexplicable, or consoling.” [\[iv\]](#)

Yes, this requiem mass reminds us: Whatever you bring with you today, it is welcome here. Whatever you’re dealing with, there is holy company for your soul, in Christ, and in this community and liturgy, which gathers the hopes and fears of all the saints and surrounds us, the living and the dead—which reminds us that we *are* surrounded, the living and the dead—with prayer and light: *May eternal light shine upon them, O Lord, in the company of thy saints for eternity.* [\[v\]](#)

In the face of things we can’t understand, we draw on the wisdom and rituals of our tradition, and do what Christians have always done: we gather with a holy community in a holy space, we support each other and grieve together in hope, we show up at the funeral and make our song even at the grave, “Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.” We remember those who have died, and the promises of Christ, and the communion of saints. We lean on each other’s prayers and hope when we can’t find our own; and we carry others with ours, when they can’t find theirs.

And we entrust our beloved dead to God, accompanying them as far we can and sending them on with our blessing, as they continue the procession of saints into heaven, into paradise, into the eternal peace and joy of God. Duruflé says of his final movement, *In Paradisum*, that this “flight of the soul toward paradise” is “the ultimate response of faith to all the questions.” It is to God then, whom we turn, and to whom we offer our prayers and commend these holy souls:

*May the angels lead you into paradise,
may the martyrs welcome you in your coming
and lead you into the city of holy Jerusalem.*

*May the choir of angels welcome you,
and with poor Lazarus of old,
may you have eternal rest.*

[\[i\]](#) From *Domine Jesu Christe*.

[\[ii\]](#) From *Introit*.

[\[iii\]](#) From *Pie Jesu*.

[\[iv\]](#) Maurice Duruflé, Program Notes for an April 1980 concert (Robert P. Eaton, Maurice Duruflé’s ‘Requiem’ Op. 9: An analysis for performance," 1991).

[\[v\]](#) From *Lux Aeterna*.