

**Pastoral Reflection:
Remembrance of the Dead**



**Diocese of Ossory
Bishop Dermot Farrell**

The commemoration of the faithful departed has a long history in the Church—it is very much part of our shared faith and of our culture. Something of this captured well by one writer who put it like this: “These days of November...make me remember. They send me to the cemetery—at least inwardly—[and] make me aware that I am not the giver of my own life. Into the cloak of my life is woven all the affection and tenderness of the people who are no longer here and whom I remember” (Dorothee Söelle, *The Mystery of Death*).

As the intangible coronavirus spreads, its effects make themselves felt in every corner of this land, and in every land across the globe. Its power and danger leave us in no doubt: on this island alone it has robbed us of 2,600 lives. Lives cut short, families brought face-to-face with helplessness and grief, in exceedingly difficult circumstances, without the usual supports at times of loss, distanced in all senses of the word from family, friends, and neighbours.

Today is a day we stand with each other, to support, to pray, and simply—but so importantly—to be with people in their grief and loss. It is a moment of solidarity with those who have lost a loved one; it is a moment of faith, and opportunity to offer the consolation and hope that faith brings.

Covid-19 with its threat of death brings into focus a key horizon in human life. It may also spur us to ask whether our priorities were previously askew. The effects of new priorities are evident everywhere, codified in the new labels “essential” and “non-essential”—though it is not always clear what determines ‘essential’ or ‘not.’ Death quickly puts what is essential for us into perspective. The pandemic brings our vulnerability home, and our dependence on each other, the gift that life is: it helps us see what is truly important in life, what matters.



*The Church of St Augustine and Monica, Casciago, Italy.
Marco Rupnik*

The pandemic has also robbed many of their hopes for the end of their lives, replacing consolation and closeness with solitude, holding loved ones at a distance, too far away to whisper our love. This is not to minimise the heroic contribution of so many nurses and doctors working in Intensive Care Units, pushed to their limits, and beyond. The fear of COVID 19 forbade your visits to hospital or nursing home, and it meant that funeral Masses were much smaller and less supportive than would have been the case otherwise. 'Online' is no replacement for in-person, for hands joined, for voices raised together in hymn and prayer, for the healing silence that carries us in grief. The absence of togetherness at the time of death was painful. Mourning demands long hours of grieving together in quiet, a stream of neighbours and friends showing up with trays of sandwiches and cakes.

What are we to say? First, and most importantly, our hearts go out to all those who lost loved ones in this difficult time. Second, we unite ourselves to them by sharing in their sorrow and pain, and we pledge our prayers, and our presence to them. Third, to remember the dead is to give thanks for them, for their being in our lives—and for the grace that was, but also to ask for mercy for them, and for forgiveness for ourselves, because death leaves us all with “unfinished” business, things we should have done or said, and “things we failed to do.” Forgiveness is not just our business, it is also—and ultimately—God’s as forgiveness brings healing in its wake, and that is the work of God. Fourth, we re-dedicate ourselves to our families, our neighbours, and our friends; we re-dedicate ourselves to a life where we take responsibility for our own well-being and the health of others. Care is not “either/or”, but “both/and.” We give thanks for all this care and support, for this strength in meekness, this witness to the Kingdom, to God’s closeness and God’s presence.

Christ’s suffering and death was not his last word. The crucified one is also the risen one. His resurrection and ours is the ultimate horizon on life. His wounds remain; the cross is not cast aside, it becomes the tree of life. It gives us a new vision, renews our strength, and offers consolation and hope through the one in whom death was defeated.

It is therefore with hope that we turn to our Father—the source of all life. We turn as Jesus did—in prayer, a wellspring in these dark times. And we pray with the psalmist—as did Jesus, Mary and Joseph—sharing their hope and trust in God:

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord,
Lord, hear my voice!
O let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleading.
If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt,
Lord, who would survive?
But with you is found forgiveness:
for this we revere you.
My soul is waiting for the Lord.
I count on his word.
My soul is longing for the Lord,
more than watchman for daybreak.

With the Lord there is mercy
and fullness of redemption,
[His people] indeed he will redeem
from all our iniquity.

[Psalm 130 (129)]

Glory be to the Father....

**+Dermot Farrell,
Bishop of Ossory**

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, (All Souls' Day) 2nd November 2020