

“..it is a holy & wholesome thought to pray for the dead ..” indeed our intention last Tuesday on feast of All Souls, & indeed throughout November, for the souls suffering still on the journey towards eternal life..

..a fitting gospel story is of the widow of Nain [ Lk 7;11-17 ] where, if you remember, we meet two crowds going in opposite directions..one excited full of joy & faith..Jesus & his companions bringing a breath fresh air into a town called Nain..the other bereft grieving hopeless..widow & large crowd of mourners taking her son out of town for burial..& we meet this morning together..some of us with quiet faith & confidence that our loved ones will by now have made it into paradise..others of us still uncertain, tested in our faith, grieving bereft & here to help pray our beloved across the threshold..

..& the common denominator ?..the presence of the Risen Christ with each/both groups of us followers..assuring us of his presence..his footsteps for us to tread in as we walk steadily if timidly on our shared journey towards Heaven..

“..with thoughts such as these you should comfort one another..”

“I believe that I shall see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living“..a call into special relationship for a particular group of us..those who struggle to believe..those who get it wrong; the ones who are always early victims in a life & religion of competition where comparison is second nature & the sheep welcomed whilst goats discarded..sadly a two directional mentality which spirituality rather than religion tries to address..where faith struggles to give birth to belief, whereas duty struggles to comply & to do the right thing.. particularly today..as we meet the Church suffering, with the widow & mourners, still struggling after a lifetime to fully believe, as we trek excitedly alongside Jesus in our life prayer & work of militancy..& Jesus sees then & now, those who mourn over the loss of a loved one, & he pauses, halts to show his solidarity in grief with them & now with us ”do not cry“..some time ago, as I led a 48r retreat for Yr11 from St Bede’s & St Joseph’s College Bradford, one of students asked me one of most searching questions I’ve ever been asked.. “do you think there is an unforgivable sin?“..instead of a usual 3min response to whole range of questions, I held this one in what we call a car park..we park it up to take at a later session in the retreat, where we can give it time depth & discussion needed to attempt to find an answer..the key is to find an answer, not produce one out of a theology book or catechism..such real faith questions merit real live faith answers..next day we’d 45mins to work on it together..we opened an image one image of heaven hell & purgatory..if God is love..total pure love..& a person dies & meets God face to face 15secs after death & is 100% good, pure love, where do they go?..immediately into Gods arms [heaven] for everlasting life..if a person dies with 1% badness on their soul, where do they go?..heaven perhaps, with just a speck of imperfection?..no..the 1% evil badness precludes them from the all-loving merciful arms of God..a contradiction in terms to think God could be subject to even a speck of badness..so those individual life choices when they has misused greatest gift God has given them, second only to gift of life..free will..when they chose what was unworthy of love, of their best self & of their God..has put up a barrier, a glass screen, between them & God..they see God through the glass, God’s arms wide open in a wonderful expression of welcome into his divine life, yet they are prevented from getting there for time being..like a wasp up against a pane of glass, desperate to get out into the sunlight again, its nose up against glass unable to get through it..purgatory..& eventually when that pain of separation, of seeing God, love personified, & not being able to get there, skims off the 1% badness, the glass shatters & they/we are united into loving arms of God in heaven..someone with just 1% of goodness in them & 99% badness goes to hell?..or purgatory?..1% of goodness in them, slightest speck of

love in them, saves them from hell..their glass is much thicker, so for them much longer in purgatory, yet knowing in faith eventually it will shatter..so then to my Yr 11 boys, what is hell?..to be in held in same state as those in purgatory..to look on face of divine love & his ever open arms of welcome & what?..to know that glass screen will never ever shatter..hell is to look on the face of God & know that, for eternity, you will have to look on face of one person who offered the two greatest gifts..life & free will..& you rejected both..very few individuals totally reject a semblance of belief in God..so finally to my Yr 11 disciples, I put their question to me back to them..“now, do you think there is an unforgivable sin?” they answered their own question..”..to refuse to believe in God”..two groups of us here & now..some of us with Jesus on a journey of joy & militancy..others here to grieve alongside their/our loved ones..”do not cry”..two gospel stories; one 2000yrs ago, the other 3yrs ago from Bradford..each with very good news..God never ever writes off anyone..however, if an individual, a very rare individual, decides to reject God & divine love, then they self sentence/self harm in realising all too late that their rejection & unbelief was to prove fatal..so we pray today & this month with & for the Church suffering..our beloved loved ones still on their journey of pilgrimage in purgatory, with the ultimate consolation in faith, knowing they are destined for kingdom of heaven..we have his word for it..a Word which became flesh, to reveal to us just how loved precious & needed we & our loved ones are..so keep praying..as they do for us..together & for ever, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, & life everlasting. Amen.

[ All Souls Yr C Lk 7;11-17 ]