

Encouragement Encouragement

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The four last things... to be remembered

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The new Catechism* tells us that there are four things we should remember – when, you may ask – and why? They of themselves sound rather gloomy and forbidding and perhaps best forgotten and not brought to mind too often. We start this month with two great Feasts, the Feast of All Saints and then quickly proceed the next day into the Feast of All Souls. That just about covers all of us. We are all destined and called to be ‘Saints’ even if we are seemingly not quite there yet – and we are certainly linked with all souls. There is in fact no Saint that has not had to struggle and many are still awaiting final liberation who are on their way to being called ‘Saints’. St. Paul refers to all believers as The Saints (Romans 15 vs.25-33). The last few sentences are an apt introduction to the statement of the Four Last Things that the Church bids us to recall, **Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell**. Meditating on these can indeed remind us of all the choices that we have to make and the inevitability of our destiny.

One of the philosophical and theological truths is that we are born to die. Death awaits us all and is a certainty. It cannot be escaped, no matter how often we try to put it out of our minds or if, somehow, by not thinking about it, we can escape. It can catch us unawares. Life can be cut short for a variety of reasons, illness, accidents, cataclysmic events, war etc. There is no escape, and for a Christian for whom the promise is eternal life, it should not be a point of fear, but natural acceptance. As Jesus said “We do not know the day or the hour” (Matthew 24 vs.36-44). The Church reminds us that it is good to reflect on our own mortality, also on the promise of eternal life. We continue on. What perhaps worries many is the second part of the reflection, that is *judgment*.

We all have to face a judgment – both at death and on the Last Day. We prefer not to think about this at all, and it has been given ‘bad press’ by many, associating this with punishment and censure. But if we look at this more deeply we realise that every day of our lives we judge others, sometimes attributing

faults and failings, other times evaluating their worth, even positively. Judgment is part of life. In our competitive world we often weigh up all things as good – better – best which is, after all, to evaluate and assess.

Being judgmental is to go merely one step further and apply censure and often prematurely to assess a person or attribute usually negatively. Yet we are reminded that God’s Judgment is based on three fundamental attributes: the first is His overwhelming Love for all He has created. Secondly is His Salvific nature and thirdly, so important, as we conclude this year, is His superabundant Mercy. He has graced us this year, to remind us all, as He revealed to St. Faustyna, that Mercy is the greatest attribute of God. Jesus refers to judgement several times in the Gospels but makes it clear that the ‘failure to love’ brings about condemnation. A person who does not love brings about judgement upon himself. We will be judged according to God’s standards not ours. And these are based on our acknowledgment of relationship with God and our fellow men. If we refuse to heed the warning words of Jesus we bring judgement upon ourselves. Rather than see God as someone wielding a big stick we should see the ‘Price Paid’ by a loving God, a gracious Father, who has saved us from eternal damnation and who loves every fibre of our being. His desire is that, by teaching us to love, as we are loved, we are saved for eternal happiness. We are therefore judged fairly but judged ‘fit’ for the Kingdom. It is not too much to ask of us to surely be the recipients of this justice.

This month we pray for those killed in world wars. In our world, people die daily who are persecuted or bombed and life does not seem precious. Here too we must remember that Heaven has been prepared for us. Our life is a gradual progression to eternity and a life of utter beauty, consolation and indeed joy. It is a better place (‘I have prepared a place for you’ Jesus tells the Apostles and Disciples). He Himself died and rose from the dead.

“Earth hath no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.”

St. Thomas More

How deeply do we believe in the afterlife? Saint Thérèse of Lisieux said “Let us go forward in peace, our eyes upon heaven, the only one goal of our labours.” There can be little doubt that Heaven exists. The problem we have is in its definition. We find it naturally hard to envisage and define – but we do know what Jesus reveals and that is a place of Glory and Victory. To the repentant thief He said “Today you will be with Me in Paradise”. Think of that word – Paradise – a lush garden – Perfection.

Conversely – Hell! – a place of no escape – a place where we put ourselves by refusing to listen to our Master and refusing to follow the way of Truth and Justice. It is not fashionable today to speak of Hell and it is glossed over and removed from language in spite of our Creedal and Baptismal Promises. But can we think of a worse state than to be full of hate, violence, depravity, unforgiveness and cruelty and completely devoid of love. We build our own hells in so many ways. If we stay in this state by choice we do not face, or desire the very things that would lift us up and out of the things that corrupt us. God has graced us with free will and graced us with the ability to change. If we refuse it we have already condemned ourselves. However difficult the path before us, however difficult the issues and sins we



have to face, the Love of God leads us to a place of safety. Hell is a place of our making...

All Saints and All Souls have pondered these four Last Things. It is because of them they have sought God, and found salvation through the life and death of Jesus. To ponder these as we move towards Advent at the end of the month is to start the preparation for reflection of why Jesus came among us, was Incarnated, became Man, why He left Himself in the Eucharist and why He will come again at the end of time.

Yes, last things – because they are fundamental to our life’s journey.

Should we unlock the door of our hearts and minds to think of these as we deepen our understanding of the Greatness of His Mercy? Halina Holman

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*(Article 12, I believe in everlasting life, section 1020 – 1043)

Pope Francis: Advent and Hope

Dear brothers and sisters, hello! Today, the first Sunday of Advent, we begin a new liturgical year, that is, a new journey of the People of God with Jesus, our Shepherd, who guides us through history toward the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God. Thus, this day has a special appeal. Through it we experience a profound sense of the meaning of history. We rediscover the beauty of all being on a journey: the Church, with her vocation and mission, and the whole of humanity, nations, civilizations, cultures, all on a journey along the paths of time. But where is this journey headed? Is there a common goal? And what is this goal? The Lord answers us through the prophet Isaiah and says: “At the end of days the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: ‘Come, let us climb the Lord’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths’” (Isaiah 2:2-3). But when will this happen? What a beautiful day it will be when weapons are destroyed to be transformed into tools for work! What a beautiful day that will be! And this is possible! Let us bet on hope, on the hope of peace, and it will be possible!

Rome 2013 .

Prayer for the Holy Souls.

Give to them eternal life, let our faith be our consolation and eternal life our hope, through the mercy of God.’



I have desired to go
Where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail,
And a few lilies blow.
And I have asked to be
Where no storms come,
Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,
And out of the swing of the sea. Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Feasts in November

1st All Saints, Holy Day of Obligation

2nd All Souls

4th St. Charles Borromeo

9th Ded. St. John Lateran

10th St. Leo the Great P.

11th St. Martin of Tours,

12th St. Josaphat

16th St. Margaret of Scotland

17th St. Elizabeth of Hungary

20th Christ the Universal King

21st Presentation of Mary

22nd St. Cecilia,

24th St. Andrew Dũng Lạc & companions

27th First Sunday of Advent

30th St. Andrew, Apostle

