

# 32<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## St. Mark 12:38-44

In World War II, a soldier was waiting for the battle to begin. He wrote a prayer and placed it inside his jacket pocket. It would be the last thing he wrote because as he went over the trenches and into battle he was shot and killed. But in that prayer he wrote: "Hear me, oh God! In my lifetime, I have not spoken with you even once, but today I have the desire to celebrate. Since I was little, they have always told me that you don't exist. And I, like an idiot, believed it. I have never contemplated your works, but tonight I have seen from the crater of a grenade the sky full of stars, and I have been fascinated by their splendour. In that instant I have understood how terrible is the deception. I don't know, O God, if you will give me your hand, but I say to you that you understand me... Is it not strange that in the middle of a frightful hell, light has appeared to me, and I have discovered you? I have nothing more to tell you. I feel happy, because I have known you. At midnight, we have to attack, but I am not afraid. You see us.

"They have given the signal. I have to go. How good it was to be with you! I want to tell you, and you know, that the battle will be difficult: Perhaps this night, I will go to knock on your door. And if up to now, I have not been your friend, when I go, will you allow me to enter? But, what's happening to me? I cry? My God, look at what has happened to me. Only now, I have begun to see with clarity. My God, I go. It will be difficult to return. How strange, now, death does not make me afraid."

Death is a difficult matter to discuss sensibly. Today funerals have become less a matter of praying for the dead than they are of celebrating their life. This, however, is a great error. Celebrating the life of one who has died is to look backwards at what has been rather than to engage with the present and to look

to the future. So funerals are an engagement with the present in faith by which we pray for the forgiveness of sins for the one who has died and we look to the future with hope in the resurrection of the body. To not pray for the dead is an abandonment of the dead.

From the beginning Holy Mother Church has honoured the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Sacrifice of the Mass, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God—that is, to see God face to face. It is a practice found in the Old Covenant as described in the second book of Maccabees, where Judas Maccabeus, the leader of the Jews, collected offerings from the people to offer a sacrifice for sin so that the dead might be released from their sin. That sacrifice was made perfect in the sacrifice of Our Lord, who by His passion, death and resurrection, bore upon Himself the sins of every man and women so that by His atonement we can be forgiven our sins. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead. St. John Chrysostom taught: “Let us help and commemorate them. If Job’s sons were purified by their father’s sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.”

All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned which we call Hell. Pope St. Gregory the Great said of this: “As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgement, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offences can be forgiven in this age, but certain others

in the age to come.”

When we pray for those who have died it reminds us of the the fullness of the Church—we here below are part of the Church Militant who pray for the holy souls suffering in Purgatory who are the Church Suffering as we join our hope for them and for ourselves that we will one day be a part of the communion of Saints in heaven who are the Church Triumphant.

Whatever we may think of those who have died, especially in our family, we should never fall into presumption but always pray for them. Even, if by the grace and mercy of God, they have now attained the glory of heaven, our prayers for them are never wasted because we believe that the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church, takes up those prayers in her arms and gives them to those who are still suffering in Purgatory, whether because they have been forgotten by us here below or because they have no one with faith enough to remember them and to pray for them.

So, in your charity and in your mercy, pray for the dead so that their sins may be forgiven and the temporal punishment due them will be remitted, so that as they take their place in the heavenly mansions before the throne of God, they may turn their eyes to you and beseech the mercy of Almighty God at your final hour.