

Mass for the Italian Community  
All Souls Day 2011

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It was in June 2004, that I wrote to the then-Lord Provost of Glasgow and outlined an idea to hold a Mass for the Italian community on All Souls Day that year. My invitation was for her to join us and it was linked to a suggestion that perhaps we could have a reception afterwards

The aim was to offer an opportunity for the members and friends of the community to come together on a day that is particularly significant to the Italian people, to remember those who had died and to maintain the bonds of solidarity which this community shares.

As you know that idea was taken up with enthusiasm and thus began the unbroken series of All Souls Day Masses which has continued to this day, becoming, I think, a fixed point in the calendar for many.

I wondered after that first evening, whether we should do it again. My thought was that people may be less inclined to come along second time round ...

Well I am glad to say that my fears were groundless, and even eighth time round I am heartened to see such support and such a demonstration of faith and piety on this special day.

Of course much has happened over those years. Some of our loved ones who were present with us in previous Masses have themselves gone to God, "marked" as the prayer reminds us "with the sign of faith".

Our physical surroundings have also changed. For the last two years we have been welcome guests at St Aloysius Church in Garnethill while the Cathedral was being renovated and the Italian Garden constructed.

I confess that I wondered in my heart of hearts whether I would still be in office as Archbishop to celebrate this Mass with you after the completion of the restoration and the construction of the garden.

I thank God for the privilege of being here with you once more, and I thank you for your generosity in helping construct the Italian Garden – many of your family names are on those plinths on the eastern wall flanking the list of those who died aboard the Arandora Star. I invite you to visit the garden which will be floodlit for you tonight after the Mass before making your way to the Reception at the Briggait.

I say all of that by way of framing tonight's celebration.

But the main point of our coming together tonight, as it has been every year, is to remember our loved ones who have died and to pray for them.

Prayer for the dead is a custom which not only benefits those for whom we pray, but also benefits us who pray.

In prayer, the bonds of love which united us on earth are kept alive. That joy in giving, which we feel towards those we love on earth, is extended beyond the tomb, as we give the gift of prayer, and in return benefit from the intercessions of those who have gone before us.

The theologians call this mutual exchange, this bond of all the living with all the dead, the "communion of saints". It is a complex doctrine to describe in an essay or a book, but it is simple, and evident and natural in the book of our hearts.

Tonight's readings help us attune ourselves to the essential message of hope of this Mass.

St John, in the first reading is very clear with us ... "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are...

Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

When we remember our loved ones who have died, it is natural that we wonder about their life. The whole idea of an afterlife defeats our imagination. But faced with that inability to picture life with God we should take comfort from the words of scripture which give us an insight.

We get such an insight from the Gospel passage too. We taste something of the consolation of heaven in those beatitudes:

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy..."

We can all think back of our own dear ones, of their own sufferings on earth and the sacrifices they made for us, and so it is surely consoling to hear them described now as "Blessed".

And so tonight is a night to look back with fondness, but let that fondness be rooted in faith. Let it manifest itself in loving prayer for the dead and let it be nourished by the words of Christ himself whom one day we will know face to face as we will surely know again those we have loved and lost a while on this earth ...

Please God may the words of scripture be repeated for ourselves and those we love: "I have gone to prepare a place for you, so that where I am, you may be too."

*L'eterno riposo dona loro, o Signore, e splenda ad essi la luce perpetua.  
Riposino in pace. Amen.*

