

## **ALL SOULS' 2024**

(Prayer of St Augustine) "Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. Teach us to offer ourselves to your service, that here we may have your peace, and in the world to come we may see you face to face, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN."

I have just read this haunting, lyrical and beautiful novel by Anne Michaels called simply 'HELD', shortlisted for this year's Booker prize. The penultimate chapter is called 'Captain's Wood, Suffolk, 2010' and it begins with this vivid description of grief (p.211):

"Whenever Helen James walked in the woods...No need to explain it any more than one needed to explain any of our senses – hearing, or tasting, or feeling the wind." (p.212)

Tonight's Gospel too, owns up to these feelings and recollections and memories. In verse 21 we read: "Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes."

Inevitably, because it is so fresh in our hearts and minds we look back to Sunday's dramatic Gospel story of Jesus raising his friend, Lazarus, back from the dead. The one for whom he wept is now restored to new life. This takes us to the heart of our Christian past, present and future and why we specially gather here tonight to remember our loved ones.

I think of those comforting words from another Saint, St Ambrose, who said of someone he knew and loved: “We have loved her in life, let us not forget her in death.”

This time and season of Remembering is of course, one to say thank you to God for those lives we cherish and keep cherishing. In our praying for a particular life or even for someone we never knew, we are keeping alive the conversation and power of prayer – in the hope, belief, and conviction even - that their tears and sorrow are past, and all suffering gone. That’s the journey and discovery which we call ‘Resurrection Life’ that they have made before us. Of course, our final journey will come too, in ‘love’s last mystery’ as the priest-poet, Malcolm Guite has said, and in God’s good time.

On Monday, I spent some time of prayer with Bertie Fried just after he died on Monday and he looked so peaceful with that toy lamb by his side – the lamb of God which he held so affectionately and so close to him. He spoke openly about the gift of dying and that beautiful French accent seemed to help (when we British tend to whisper about such things)! He also spoke so tenderly about going to meet Jesus as if going and returning to his true heavenly home, where the angels sing and all the saints’ cry, ‘Welcome.’

All our readings, prayers and lighting our candles, reflect those resounding words and confident claim by our Lord and Saviour:

“I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

Let's believe His promise, the Promise of His Glory, and never relinquish it.

In the name...

AMEN.