

## ALL SOULS' HOMILY

I was in a hospital bed some years ago now and I saw Bobby Charlton armed with a big bunch of flowers going into the neighbouring ward. This was a famous Manchester hospital, and it made my day that I just got a sighting of one of my childhood heroes (I am just old enough to remember a famous World Cup moment in 1966). One of the nurses said to me, 'Oh yes, he is a regular visitor here – such a kind and caring ambassador for his sport. He is often sent by someone or other to people he doesn't really know, she said.'

I was sorry to hear of his passing recently because he was famous without being a 'celebrity' and he was a gentleman, we would say, sadly 'of the old school' – unassuming, polite, a great encourager and not a 'professional complainer' or someone who bore any kind of grudge. In his playing days, even if they very occasionally lost a match, he would bounce back for the next game and say: 'Come on, lads, let's score some goals today!'

We are particularly remembering tonight not someone so much whom we watched and admired from afar but instead close family, whose lives specially touched, influenced and shaped our own. We know they were not perfect (as some memorial services would have us think), they made mistakes like us, just as they also made us happy or fulfilled. It is the most natural thing in the world to light a candle for them tonight, to remember them as only we knew them personally and intimately. And in our Christian context, particularly in

our liturgy and worship, we know their new pilgrimage of faith is already well under way; their destination is the same as ours will be: the promise by our Creator God to find, discover and enjoy the heavenly kingdom. With the Cross and the Empty tomb so passionately linked and entwined in the story of our salvation, we should indeed expect a great and wonderful 'welcome home' when Christ invites us into that eternal space and says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

I want a big send off when I go, and yes, a 'Requiem Eucharist' will do nicely – because the Eucharist speaks more powerfully to me than any other encounter with Jesus – the Last Supper and the Road to Emmaus were both instigated by him. They both speak and encourage us to believe that death can never be the final word. What matters most is to be fed and nourished by him who promised us the gift of eternal life.

It is important to leave instructions about our own funerals in our wills and even though I say this a lot, it is something many people ignore. But you know, even more important than that is to pray for a 'good death' (something denied the tragic young victims right now in Gaza) and to pray that we will be gracious, accepting, and desirous to meet our Maker.

These words of TS Eliot from 'Little Gidding' say more eloquently than I can, how precious that gift of praying remains for each of us...

"If you came this way,  
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,

At any time or at any season,  
It would always be the same: you would have to put off  
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,  
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity  
Or carry report. You are here to kneel  
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more  
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation  
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.  
And what the dead had no speech for, when living,  
They can tell you, being dead: the communication  
Of the fdead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the  
living.  
Here, the intersection of the timeless moment  
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.”

Amen.