

ALL SOULS' PATRONAL FESTIVAL 2025 **THE BIG PICTURE** dtw

Luke 6, 21 Jesus said *Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh*

Do you find that your life often faces contradictions or conflicting dispositions? I do. From the trivial things like what to eat tonight to the more substantial things like feelings of inadequacy yet at the same time purpose, of disappointment yet also a quiet assurance that, in the words of Julian of Norwich, all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well.' I remember a moment in my second curacy at Edwardstown as a young priest, and before I was married, when I was feeling some kind of depression or darkness and I was driving along a street and stopped at the lights. Waiting at the crossing was a nun in full black and white habit, who saw me through the windscreen at the wheel wearing my own black and white, and she smiled at me like it was a brief encounter of sacred, mutual vocation. I drove on and burst into tears, and my cloud just lifted right there and then. The moral of my story? Never lose sight of the big picture. This is also the story of the people of God. This is the story of the people of All Souls' St Peters as today we celebrate our Patronal Festival and are caught up in the fellowship of all the Saints and the whole company of heaven. Whatever is going on, whatever challenges face us, never lose sight of the big picture.

Our Church Title reminds us that as Christians, we are called to acknowledge the mystery of life and the mystery of suffering and death. Rather than find definitive, black and white answers, we are called to deal creatively with these mysteries as our human lot in life and to ponder the deeper revelations they bring about the universe and our finite, little space within it. We will all die one day; there is nothing more certain. It was guaranteed the day we first drew breath that one day we would breathe our last. But some people certainly suffer more than others along the way. Jesus of Nazareth himself was such a one but when he said his final words from the cross, *Father into your hands I commend my spirit*, the world changed forever. And your life and my life changed too. When Jesus was about to meet his final hour of suffering and death at the untimely age of about 33 or 34, he said some seemingly bizarre words on face value to his eager disciples (John 12. 23-25): *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very*

truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

I often use the symbol of wheat at a funeral where it is appropriate (showing congregation heads of wheat bound together) and when I do so, I quote those words of Jesus and give thanks for the fruit born of the life of that woman or that man. I give thanks not only for children and grandchildren where relevant, but more importantly for the many characteristics, the unique gifts and qualities that made up the life of that person, for which all loved ones and friends present feel so much the richer, and the world is a richer place too! *Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit*

St Paul wrote to the new Christians of Corinth, *So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen, for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal*

Over the years of my ministry as a priest, I have come to understand cancer as one of the most unfathomable mysteries of life, particularly when we live in an age where scientific, biological and medical breakthroughs abound. My own mother died of cancer and just at the end of June this year, my sister too, and many other relatives and friends. Your stories will be similar. I want to suggest to you today that alongside this mystery of suffering stands the mystery of the cross and the innocent, untimely passion and death of a Saviour. My sister's cancer was not fair. But she knew, and he told me as much, that her suffering was not the final commentary on life. Neither was the cross.

The final story is: God is Love. That is where the cross goes: into Love. And Resurrection! Elizabeth knew that was where she was going, and on the way, in the few short days we had, she taught us about dignity, glory, grace and the many blessings of this life. This Eucharist is but a foretaste of that Heavenly Banquet prepared for all the Faithful Departed - indeed, in every respect, this Patronal Festival is our Annual

Requiem Mass for all those blessed ones who have gone before us into Christ. There could be no higher or better way to do this in memory of them, as we always Do This in Memory of Him. This is the Big Picture.

Getting back to lives that are full of contradictions, I will conclude with a poem entitled ***For When People Ask*** by Rosemary Wahtola Trommer.

I want a word that means *okay* and *not okay*,
A word that means *devastated* and *stunned with joy*.
I want the word that says *I feel it all at once*.
The heart is not like a songbird singing only one note at a time,
more like a Tuvan throat singer able to sing both a drone
and simultaneously two or three harmonics high above it –
a sound, the Tuvans say, that gives the impression
of wind swirling among rocks.
The heart understands the swirl, how the churning of opposite feelings
weaves through us like an insistent breeze,
leads us wordlessly deeper into ourselves, blesses us with paradox
so we might walk more openly
into this world so rife with devastation,
this world so ripe with joy