

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

I live at the Cathedral in Portsmouth and in the evenings I like going out for a short walk; I often say the Rosary. Since childhood, I've always loved the night sky, looking at the stars: I've got a fantastic app on my phone you can point at the sky and it identifies for you the planets and galaxies! But in the city, the traffic, the streetlights, the shops are so bright, you can barely see the Moon let alone any stars. I mention this because spiritually the secular culture we live in today is like that; it's full of great potential, wonderful things; it makes life busy, absorbing, bright. But like the city lights, it easily obscures the sacred canopy of God, heaven, the angels and saints. This is why as the bishop I want to encourage you to keep coming to Mass and to practice your Faith.

But first, let me say a word about the Gospel we've just heard, about the Sadducees, who like some people today don't believe in life after death. They put a trick question to Jesus about a woman married many times over. His reply is profound. For Jesus confirms the dead WILL rise again: God IS GOD, NOT OF THE DEAD BUT OF THE LIVING; TO HIM ALL ARE ALIVE. This is amazing, an answer to the deepest longing of the human heart, the desire for immortality, to live forever. This belief was already developing in OT times, as we heard in 1stR, the Book of Maccabees, written a century before Christ, when one of the martyrs bravely said: THE KING OF THE WORLD WILL RAISE US UP TO LIVE AGAIN FOR EVER. But in today's Gospel, Jesus also gives us a glimpse of the life of heaven. In the risen life, there's no need to procreate so in heaven people do not marry, although we rightly trust that the bonds of love linking us on earth will be even stronger in heaven, albeit not exclusive. So today's Gospel responds to a deep human need. Jesus assures us: our short life on earth is nothing compared to life with God in Paradise.

A few years ago in Belgium I visited an allied war cemetery. It's true what they say: in those cemeteries, the birds don't sing! I'm not sentimental, but it was very moving to

see thousands of white crosses in rows in the ground. Some had names: John 19 Leeds, Ian Smith 17; an unknown soldier, but nearly every one a teenager. We pray today, Remembrance Sunday, for those who died in the two 20C world wars. We pray too for those who have given their lives more recently, for us and for our freedom. Indeed, let us pray for all who serve in our armed forces for their safety and successful return, as we ask God to grant peace on earth, and an end to violence, terrorism and war.

I SHALL BE FILLED WHEN I AWAKE WITH THE SIGHT OF YOUR GLORY, O LORD. I'm very happy to be with you today, but I want to encourage you to remain faithful to Mass and the practice of your Catholic faith. This is the time of the year, as nature undergoes a dying process of autumn before the sleep of winter, when the Church invites us to think about the life of the world to come and to pray for the faithful departed. In every Mass, Jesus lays down his life for us, feeding us with his Body and Blood, the Food of Immortality, so that we might rise with him to a new way of living and one day to eternal life. This is why the Mass is the most important thing in life. So in this Mass as we remember those who have died, let us pray also for ourselves. Like that brave mother and her seven sons in 1stR, may we too be prepared to die rather than to deny the truth or to abandon our Catholic Faith. Indeed, may we persevere and one day be found worthy of the happiness of heaven.