

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

In the month of November the dead are very much in our prayers. A florist in Belgium once told me that her best day for business all year was 1 November. Admittedly, it was mostly chrysanthemums she sold: hardy flowers which, when placed reverently on graves in the cemetery, could be forgotten and yet trusted to be in bloom, despite the weather, for several weeks. *Forget me not* comes the reedy voices of the netherworld, a little menacing in tone. But most of us who visit the graves of our loved ones or have Masses offered for the repose of their souls during November do so out of love. It is a way of saying an inadequate thanks for the myriad ways they have brought love and blessings into our lives.

This weekend is Remembrance Day in the UK and is but a few days short of 11 November (Armistice Day in much of Europe). We remember those millions who died, soldiers and civilians, during the terrible world wars of the 20th century, while not forgetting those who have died in wars that are still raging (Yemen, Mali etc.). As the liturgical year comes to its end, the Church invites us to reflect in the latter weeks of Ordinary Time less on those who have died than on the imminent arrival of our own death. The charming parable of the ten bridesmaids who became sleepy while awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom is designed to give us advance warning of our own death. The point of the parable is to get us to be ready for the Lord when he comes. The lamps are the symbols of our faith, but if they are not lighting brightly then they avail no one, least of all the bridegroom. The oil for our lamps is that grace or spiritual fuel with which our regular exposure to the word of God and the energy which the sacraments give us keeps us supplied.

In this extraordinary year, as we cope with our second lockdown, the word of God is permanently available to us. In fact, we now have even more time to read and imbibe it, and extra time to reflect on what it means to us. We can all be wise bridesmaids. The issue was not that the bridesmaids fell asleep – human weakness and the need for rest is something all of us experience – but that only five of the ten had had the foresight to be prepared, with oil for their lamps, when the bridegroom came. And how can we best be prepared? The answer is simple: by keeping our relationship with God in good order, by letting his word transform our outlook on life, and by living virtuously. Simple, yes, but how many of us manage it? Maybe one of the collateral benefits of the pandemic is that we take our preparations for our inevitable end that little bit more seriously.

Father Patrick