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“This in the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day” (John 6:39).

The Commemoration of the Faithful Departed

Wis 3:1-9; Rom 6:3-9; John 6:37-40

In 2002, the year after the September 11, 2001, attacks, singer-songwriter Bruce Springsteen released an album called “The Rising.” The title song channels the thoughts of a fireman ascending a stairwell in the doomed inferno of the World Trade Towers in search of trapped victims. The chorus captures both the grief and determination the nation was struggling through in the dark days and months following the attacks. The fact of death was never so palpable. Where can we turn except to some message of restoration, even resurgence, after the worst thing that can happen to any human community? We reach forward out of the darkness to “The Rising.”

Jacqueline Kennedy was once quoted as saying that the Catholic church, for all its faults and irrelevance for many modern secularists, really knew how to help people deal with death. The church’s rituals and symbols, so ancient and reassuring, carry the mourners through their grief to hear the Gospel message that love is stronger than death. Our beloved dead are in the everlasting embrace of God, who is all

powerful and all merciful.

Though gone from sight, absent physically from the world and from our lives, our beloved dead are still present in some mysterious way, cheering us on to the same goal they now possess fully and joyfully. God keeps every promise, and God's mercy receives us even in our sins and shortcomings, including us among the "saints," both famous and ordinary. Everyone is there, welcomed and restored as a new creation.

Science confronts faith with the fact of death. Our culture explores it in movies about ghosts, zombies, the living dead, and in inspiring stories about heroes who lay down their lives for others. We search for answers, a glimpse through the veil of loss to find a connection to those who are gone. All the answers take us into the realm of faith, and what reassurance we find is a matter of belief, not certainty. The human mind and heart seem wired to the question: "What happens next? Will we ever see you again?"

We hear the answer from the Book of Wisdom: "The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace" (3:1). We hear the promise from Jesus: "This is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day."

The Eucharist is the "Thanksgiving" we offer as we celebrate that Jesus, our Lord and brother, has gone before us through death to new life. We follow him by emptying our lives into the community, by serving one another, by giving ourselves away long before the day we utter our last word and breathe our final breath. We believe that God has entrusted us to Jesus, and because he has given his life for us, even though we die, we will be with him forever.

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