

**The trumpet will send its wondrous sound, throughout earth's sepulchres
And gather all before the throne...
King of fearful majesty...Nourishing light of the Trinity
Join us with the blessed.**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

Nicholas Cubbley was afraid. Afraid of ghosts. Afraid, most particularly, of the ghost he now knew conclusively to be haunting his bedroom. He'd had his concerns, like every 7 year old boy, about the shadows, and the window ledge behind the curtains, and the not-quite-closed wardrobe door, but now he'd seen proof. "I'm going to place this lit candle under a glass," his friend had explained, "and we'll try and blow it out. Now, we won't be able to because our breath can't move through glass, but a ghost can move through things - if there is a ghost here it could get inside and snuff out the flame." Nicholas nodded - that made sense. "Blow!" Nothing. Not even a flicker. "Now let's ask the ghost....." The moment the candle went out Nicholas screamed. And in that moment, and for many months to come I imagine, he was genuinely frightened.

Now of course, looking back, I feel bad about that - but I was 6 years old, and, to be honest, a little jealous of Nicholas and his family's impressive array of sports cars. And, then, there was the not insignificant matter of my payment of 20 Refreshers and a pack of Trebor Double Agents.

There are those - among them it must be said many of the reformers - who have claimed that it is just this kind of trading off other people's credulity that lurks *behind* the feast of All Souls, with its links to the theology of purgatory and the clear distinction, it might be seen to make, between the faithful departed - or the church penitential - and the saints we celebrated yesterday - the church triumphant.

And certainly, in the years since at least the 10th Century that the church has continued to mark All Souls, there has been no shortage of confusing theology, and either misguided or even manipulative attempts to engage with those *oldest* of human instincts - the impulse to stare into the grave, to continue to look for those our eyes no longer see, to wonder if they are, for better or worse, still with us.

Now, not that long ago people were arguing that in our contemporary culture we would soon leave behind such superstitions, looking back on them with the kind of embarrassment, and even indignation, that my schoolfriend Nicholas no doubt felt in his later years...

But glance at the TV guide or cinema billboards at this time of year, the bestsellers lists, this weekend in pictures on-line or simply the number of costumed children roving the streets on Halloween, and an enduring fascination quickly reveals itself which gives the lie to any such suggestion.

We are still haunted by death, still troubled by the grave, still fascinated by ghosts.

Yet the truth is that All Souls is no more the province of ghosts, than The Eve of All Hallows' should be, instead it is part of this autumn triduum's *re-casting* of our popular responses to the spectres and skeletons in our closets;

And as the text of Wisdom set for this occasion makes clear, this feast is just as much designed to correct our attitudes to the life invisible, as all of our faith has - from its original accounts of creation, to its liturgies of the new creation - continually been concerned to take up and recapitulate the common instincts of the human spirit .

The two things which have always frightened us about death, are on the one hand the idea that it might not after all be a final farewell - that things from beyond the grave might be able to return, to penetrate and disturb our flesh and blood lives. And on the other hand, the possibility that the separation of the dead from the living might be so final, that the grave ultimately becomes the place of those who are no more remembered, the land of forgetfulness as the Psalmist puts it.

The thoroughness of the transformation of death in the Easter faith of Christianity, however - though sometimes forgotten even by the faithful - is made clear in the paradoxical Christian idea of the grave itself becoming somehow... holy.

Of course, as long as there have been humans, there have been burial rites and practices that have marked the grave as sacred - if by sacred we mean a point of contact with the beyond, or simply treated with honour. There is nothing new or unique or particularly Christian about the desire to remember the dead, or ensure their safe passage to *other* shores. But if by sacred or holy we mean set apart as the province of the divine, the incorruptible - of celestial light - then describing as we do the *archetypal* Christian grave - the site of our Lord's burial - as the Holy Sepulchre - articulates the same revolution as the one we express by calling the most tragic day of the Kalendar, Good Friday. And begs the same questions: how can the tragedy of death be good without ceasing to be a tragedy, how can our mortality be transfigured without our ceasing to be human, how can a grave be not just significant but a source of light and life.

Even whilst they remind us of the inevitability of our doom, these twin feasts (of All Saints & All Souls) - as part of the celebration of the Easter Mystery that is the focus and Rosetta Stone of every moment of the Christian year - call us to remember why the graves of all the faithful departed, are marked, as we are in life, with the sign of the cross - that is to point to Christ's death and resurrection, and in light of it, for the same reason that people mark any plot of earth with a cross. To show that there is treasure buried here.

The New Testament tells the parable of the man who finding treasure in a field went and buried it again, in order to go and buy the whole plot. And whilst this story has a great many interpretations, it sheds a particular light on those, departed this life in the faith of Christ, whom we have buried.

It was that man's interest in what lay hidden from sight - the precious trove he knew, despite appearances, to be there - that led him to value that fertile acre beyond price; and it is the same sense that lies behind the veneration of the site of the Holy Sepulchre, and behind any visit to the Churchyards that derive from it, as behind occasions like these - not only the treasuring of that which now lies buried, the faith in that which is unseen, but the hope of finding in the very place of death something truly holy - of seeing, even in the darkness, the blaze of perpetual light.

Because our graves, not just of the Saints, but *all* Christian graves - are based on the very first: the site of the holy mystery, where what the lifted pall reveals is the unique death and resurrection we all come to share in, the place of life let go - and hope held on to. The emptiness of that tomb was the treasure brought to light - the new resurrection life of humanity - whilst the intact graves of the faithful departed are nothing less than this already unearthed treasure, lying hidden once more - waiting for the ground to be broken open...

If we are honest, despite our faith, and adult sophistication, not many of us have managed to entirely throw off those earliest human fears about death and the grave, as being too final or not final enough. But whatever the popular instincts it might resonate with, or even appeal to, Christian remembering of the kind that this feast embodies, is neither about warding off the intrusion of the dead returning into our realm, nor about striving to hang on in our memory to those lost to sight - to *hold* them in our life together somehow... It is about recognising the transforming presence, even in the very realm of death, of the one who is the resurrection and the life, and being drawn in him, with those who have gone before us into the life they and we will finally fully participate in together - the Corporate life of the Risen Christ.

We do not ignore death, any more than our Incarnate Lord did in becoming obedient to it, we do not disregard our mortality any more than our Crucified and Risen Lord did in taking it up into the life of the Godhead, but neither do we grieve or fear like those without hope. And the prayer we offer on this night, as on every occasion we proclaim the Lord's death, and intercede for all whose souls are in the hand of God, is that he will take these finite earth formed creatures, and by the breath of his spirit, transform them, unearthing in them the riches of Heaven itself, making them to be the Body of Christ, to shine transfigured with light perpetual.

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