

*Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine
et lux perpetua luceat eis*

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine on them

As this feast of All Saints draws to a close

And in light of today's readings

Peter espousing a life of blessing that responds to God's Grace

And John telling us of Jesus raising from the dead those who have led such a
life at the end of the age

It feels eminently appropriate to be holding this requiem mass this year of all
years

When we have lost so many as a society to the global pandemic

Gabriel Faure wrote his choral setting of the shortened Catholic Mass for the
Dead in 1887

Compared with the fire and brimstone of Verdi and Berlioz, and the gentle
tones of Brahms

Faure took a different approach, describing his Requiem

As being dominated from beginning to end by a very human feeling of faith in eternal rest

The Requiem was first sung publicly in Paris in 1888, for the funeral of the architect Joseph Lesoufache, with the Pie Jesu sung by a treble soloist.

In those days, the church authorities did not allow female singers,

and Faure composed the work with boy treble and alto soloists in mind.

However, he preferred female singers for the upper choral parts and the Pie Jesu,

who he was finally able to employ when his requiem reached the concert hall.

No doubt the great man would very much approve of Debbie's performance later this evening

rather than that of my eleven year old self some years ago

This work – which at its core is a prayerful lament for the dead

And the restful, fear-free nature of death

Offers us an opportunity to reflect on the memory those we have lost as a society

Those lost this year to this parish, this church

And all those known to us that we see no longer

But at the heart of today's gospel reading

Is the message of Good News.

A message that a time is not only coming but has already come

John, in keeping with the nature of his, the most spiritual of the gospels

Overlays the ministry of Jesus in Galilee and Judea with his post-Easter works in the Church

And signposts Christ's role at the end of the age

That he will raise the dead

And will be their judge

These are the 'greater things' he refers to

This is what the signs – the miracles he performs in his ministry – are signposting

The kingdom is coming

But the kingdom has already broken in with God becoming flesh

The kingdom is also

Already here

On his true nature

He tells them that he is sent by and obedient to the Father

That he can do nothing without the Father

But that he is so submitted to the Father that the two are one

This would go on to form the cornerstone of our doctrine of the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Bear in mind he has just defended healing the man at the pool

On the Sabbath, of all days

And the Jewish Priests have accused him of blasphemy

Now, they see him as claiming to be a rival deity

Not understanding his claim to be in unity with the Father

And to most of the Jews, it is God who raises the dead. God who is judge of the world.

These were bold claims indeed.

At the time of writing, the persecution of Christians had begun

And these claims – and our faith in them – are not to be taken lightly

As C S Lewis famously wrote

‘In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, these words imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivalled by any character in history...

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God’.

And fall at his feet we must.

In his epistle

Peter speaks of submission for the Lord’s sake

of submission of wives to their husbands and husbands to their wives

In a passage that the most evangelically conservative of Christians

Don't half like to take out of context.

Because what Peter is doing – and writing this 2,000 years ago bear in mind –

It telling us that – up to a point – we should do what society expects

And submit

But we should only submit up to a point

Because - he tells us - recognising Christ's lordship is non-negotiable

Christian wives are told not to follow the beliefs of non-Christian husbands.

For a wife not to do so in first century Palestine was virtually unthinkable.

It is very easy to miss the nuance when hearing this reading through modern ears

Peter is telling us to love and respect one another. And if we don't do that, then our prayers, our worship are meaningless.

And his over-riding message

Is that as Christian people we inherit the kingdom now

And we are raised to eternal life at the end of days

Because of the way we live our lives now.

The early church took this so seriously

That they didn't really have a sense of evangelism and mission

They led by example. They followed The Way

That others might follow them

'Actions speak louder than words' might have been their mantra

What does all this mean for us, and indeed for what we should take away from today's service when we leave tonight?

The feast of All Saints came into being

In the third century during the time of the Diocletian persecutions

when the Church ran out of days of the week to celebrate the ever-increasing number of Canonised saints.

Ultimately, they simply lost track, and dedicated today to the memory

Of all the nameless ones

But the feast of All Saints is about more than that.

And since medieval times the church has looked ahead to the commemoration of All Souls on 2nd November

Remembering all those we have lost who have followed the path of Christ,

And reminding ourselves to follow that same path

And so this evening we commit to follow The Way

As we remember those who have gone before us

And commend their souls to God

In paradisum deducant te Angeli;

in tuo adventu suscipiant te martyres,

et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem.

Chorus angelorum te suscipiat,

et cum Lazaro quondam paupere

æternam habeas requiem.

May the angels lead you into paradise;

may the martyrs receive you at your arrival

and lead you to the holy city Jerusalem.

May choirs of angels receive you and with Lazarus,

once (a) poor (man),

may you have eternal rest.

Amen