

HOMILY 32C

*On a tomb stone was written the words:
'Remember stranger as you pass by
As you are now so once was I
As I am now so you will be
So prepare yourself to follow me.'
Some wit wrote with chalk down at the bottom:
'To follow you I am quite content
But how do I know which way you went.'*

In today's Gospel the Sadducees pose a question to Jesus hoping to ridicule his teaching about Resurrection and Eternal Life.

I notice that funeral tributes these days, even among Catholics, relate more to the earthly life of the departed than their eternal destiny. Praying for the happy repose of the person's soul should be the principal focus of the funeral liturgy. Having said that we're not suggesting that you say nothing about the deceased person's life.

To be dubious about belief in life after death seems to me to go against the deepest longings of the human heart. We rightly recoil at the prospect of total nothingness when this life is over. Some people say 'once you're dead you're dead.' From a purely rational point of view that just doesn't make sense.

Nature itself proclaims the supremacy of life over death. The great scientist Werner Von Braun wrote: 'Science tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace'. For instance this year's decayed leaves will serve as nutrients for next year's new growth. Nature does not know extinction - all it knows is transformation. Braun goes on: 'everything that Science has taught me strengthens my belief in the continuity of our existence beyond the grave'.

The changing pattern of the day and the seasons also tell the same story – night giving way to dawn, winter yielding to spring - all keep reminding us that, in death, nature is only sleeping – a bit like certain animals hibernating for the winter. But human life transcends that of the animals and plants – we are the cream of God's creation. The bible says: 'we are made in the image and likeness of God'. It would be inconceivable that God would allow the cream of his creation, which is us, to 'dissolve into thin air' when our earthly pilgrimage was over. If that happened, life would be absurd. The inspired word of Scripture and the Creed proclaims loud and clear that even our bodies which lie in the dust of death will be raised up on the last day, those who lived good lives will rise to eternal glory, those who lived bad lives to shame and everlasting disgrace.

The Evil One tries to temp us away from believing that there is an Eternal Life at all. On her deathbed St Theresa wrote: 'I hear a mocking voice whispering to me: 'You dream of a land of light and fragrance. You believe that the Creator will be forever yours. Dream on - look forward to Death. It will give you, not what you hoped for, but a night still darker - the night of utter nothingness'.

November – the month of the Holy souls is a constant reminder that we are mortal beings. But in the world to come death will be no more – the world of the past will have gone.