

## 32C

*On a tomb stone in Hickleton cemetery near Doncaster are written the sombre 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 wise wit wrote with chalk down at the bottom: 'To follow you I am quite content but how do I know which way you went.'*

Well, for believers our signpost should unmistakably be pointed in the direction of Heaven. But this is not always the case.

Often at church funerals some try to take the sting out of death by making the funeral as cheerful as possible. 'A Celebration of Life' may be preferred to the word 'funeral'. These bespoke ceremonies usually look back rather than forward, with the emphasis on happy memories of the death person. But there is little acknowledgement of the sadness left behind or God's promise of life Eternal. The emphasis is mostly on past achievements rather than future hope.

To be hesitant about belief in the after-life seems to go against the deepest longings of the human heart. We rightly recoil at the prospect of total oblivion when we pass. 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 famous German rocket scientist Werner Von Braun, captured by the Americans after the war, and the brains behind the first moon landing in 1969 wrote: 'Science tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace. Nature does not know extinction - all it knows is transformation. He goes on: 'everything that Science has taught me strengthens my belief in the continuity of our existence beyond the grave'. And that's coming from a famous scientist.

The never-ending daily orbit of the Sun allowing night to give way to day, the changing pattern of the seasons with 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. The bible says: 'we are made in the image and likeness of God'. Bearing this in mind, it would be inconceivable that God would allow us, made in his image, to disappear into oblivion when our earthly pilgrimage is over. If that happened, life would indeed be absurd. Sacred Scripture and the Creed proclaims loud and clear that

even our bodies which lie in the dust of death will be raised on the last day, 'some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace' (Book of Daniel).

The Evil One tries to tempt us away from believing that there is an Eternal Life at all. Shortly before she passed away, St Theresa wrote: 'I heard a mocking voice which whispered: 'You dream of a land of light and fragrance. You believe that the Creator will be forever yours. Hope 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 when our mortal nature puts on immortality mourning and sadness will be put behind us – 'the world of the past will have gone' (Revelation).*