

Life everlasting

*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.' dubious*

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

I notice funeral tributes these days, even among Catholics, relate more to the earthly life of the departed than their eternal destiny. According to the mind of the church, funeral services should be more focussed on praying for the happy repose of the soul of the person and reaffirming our faith in resurrection to Eternal life than revolving too much round over-the-top eulogies on the deceased life. Eulogies are in fact forbidden. That doesn't mean we don't mention anything about the person – of course not. But it appears to me that many people these days would prefer not to think about their ultimate destinies - even at funerals.

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 your dead.' From a purely rational point of view that just doesn't make sense.

Nature itself proclaims the supremacy of life. The great scientist Werner Von Braun 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'.

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 – we are the cream of God's creation. 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 to disappear without a trace when our earthly pilgrimage is 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 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 tempt us away from believing that there is an Eternal Life at all. Towards the end of her short life 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 in the world to come death and sadness will be put behind us – the world of the past will have gone.

QUESTIONS

- 1. Would it come across more authentic if funeral masses were reserved for 'practicing Catholics' only and funeral services assigned to those who had abandoned the public practice of their catholic faith in their youth. Discuss*
- 2. Should one be able to deduce that there is life beyond this one from our study of nature and the natural Universe? Discuss*
- 3. Pope Saint John Paul 11 said hat Heaven and Hell and Purgatory are not 'places' but 'states of being'. Eternity is another form of consciousness – more penetrating than this one. Discuss*
- 4. Could the group share some thought it might have of Heaven and life beyond the grave?*
- 5. Most people these days cannot reconcile a place of eternal damnation with a merciful God. How does the group feel about this? Discuss*

