

## Homily for the Faithful Departed

November 4, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Parish Requiem, Mass II: 1 Corinthians 15:50–58; Psalm 42:1–7; John 6:37–40*

For a month now, I've been trying to remember a scene from, I think, a movie. An older man, who knows he is dying, says very gently to a younger person, if memory serves, "Death is nothing to be afraid of. We are all going to die"—if that rings a bell for anyone, please let me know where I might have picked it up.

I know the world is full of people who live and die without the hope of the world to come. I have no explanation for people who think the creation sprang from nothing. I am not one of them.

My first funeral as a rector was of a much loved and respected senior member of the congregation in Michigan City, Indiana, born and baptized there as an infant. I began the practice of writing about how I knew, as the pastor, the person at whose funeral I would officiate. It's never been easy for me to hold my emotions in check at a funeral. Mostly I do, but again, it's never easy. Writing in the newsletter meant that

funeral homily could be more focused on our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

One of the things I always did in Michigan City was to go to the Memorial Day parade. There was a town band in uniform—my GP played the clarinet. Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, and other groups marched. It started downtown and ended up in Greenwood Cemetery. It is in the middle of Michigan City, much in the same way Central Park is in the middle of Manhattan. There is a Protestant section, the Roman Catholics, Muslim, Jewish cemeteries are all there. After the last patriotic song was played, people visited the graves of family members and friends. My presence was a pastoral one. I learned a lot about families and the parish on that holiday.

My dad is buried in Maine, my mother, and stepfather in southern Maryland. My grandparents' graves are in New Hampshire and Virginia. I want to revisit them soon.

All of the gospel lessons for Prayer Book funerals are from John. Today's lesson is the second of five, "All that the Father gives me will come to me." The verbs here are present indicative active and future indicative active. This is who God is and what God does. And it

is God who invites us to be together and to remember for whom we give thanks at this Holy Table today.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2020 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.