

WE REMEMBER

THEM

ALL SOULS

CYCLE B

Daniel 12:1-3

Romans 6:3-9

John 6:37-40

GATHERING

(In the center of the gathering is a table covered with a white cloth. On the table stands a large lighted candle, preferably with a Christ symbol on it, a small dish of water, and a small vase of bright flowers. A supply of small slips of white paper and a pencil are available for each member.)

Last week we reflected on the request the blind Bartimaeus made of Jesus. This week we consider together the gift of eternal life that Jesus makes possible for all who believe in him. How did you follow Jesus on the road this past week? *(The community shares briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The leader invites those present to take several slips of paper and the pencil and to write on each the name of a family member or friend who has died and for whom they wish to pray. Quiet instrumental music is played. Each person places the names of their loved ones around the Christ candle. When all have done so, they pray the following prayer together.)

All:

We seem to give them back to You,
O God Who gave them to us!
Yet as You did not lose them in giving
So we do not lose them by their return.
Not as the world gives do You give,
O Lover of us!
What You give You do not take away.
For what is Yours is ours also,
If we are Yours!

Life is eternal;
Love is immortal.
Death is only a Horizon;
A Horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight.

Lift us up, strong Spirit of God,
That we may see further.
Cleanse our eyes
That we may see more clearly.
Draw us closer to Yourself
That we may know ourselves
To be nearer to our loved ones who are with You!

While You prepare a place for us
Prepare us also for that happy place
That where You are we may also be forevermore!

Author Unknown

Focus Question

Recall an experience of a death that has moved you.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause between readings.)

Commentary

Some years ago, believers and non-believers alike were moved by the extraordinary example of faith of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin as he was dying. He referred to death as a "friend". He also walked that journey toward physical death as one walks to meet a friend, sad to leave but anticipating being welcomed by another Friend. Cardinal Bernardin's example caught the attention of the larger community. He was on the cover of *Newsweek*. He was mentioned in the President's Inaugural Address. He was the topic of an untold number of conversations by people all over the country.

Death is something which, for obvious reasons, we tend to keep at a distance. Death tends to be viewed as an intruder in life. We would prefer that death have no place in our lives, but it does. People we know and love die, and, when they do, we are reminded that we also will one day die. Death is as much a part of life as birth is, but because so much is unknown about death we fear it. Fear usually gives rise to strange ideas. Notice how many bizarre, superstitious and frightening notions about death, and what happens after death, there are in our culture. However, faith in Jesus and the message he taught takes death out of the realm of darkness and unresolvable fear and robs death of its power over us. We are grateful for the lives of faithful disciples such as our brother Joseph Bernardin who remind us of that fact, and for the word of God that draws us back to that truth of our faith.

In our first reading from the prophet Daniel, a later book of the Hebrew Scripture, we find a more highly developed belief about death on the part of the Jewish people. Daniel describes in primitive terms the continuation of life after death. Saint Paul writes in his pastoral letter to the Roman faith community, our second reading, that the shape of our life after death depends on our relationship with God in Christ. Baptized into the death of Jesus, living in freedom with Jesus, we will rise with Jesus to new and fuller life as Jesus did. Lastly, our Gospel draws us into a reflective teaching of Jesus about death: it is God's great desire that all should be raised up to eternal life.

And so, in the face of all the bizarre theories about death and what follows it, God's word clearly presents the beliefs we hold about death: life

continues after death; how I live my life in relationship with God and others shapes what form that life will have for me; and finally, but most importantly, God's grace and mercy are, as always, somehow involved in this journey. How important it is for us to allow the truth of our faith in Jesus to shape what we believe about the great mystery of life and death!

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

(The community pauses in silence for several minutes to ponder the scriptures and the questions which follow.)

1. What frightens you about death?
2. Recall one personal experience that reinforced your belief in life after death.
3. What is one practice surrounding death that helps you believe what Jesus teaches about it?
4. Confronting death helps one to live life fully. How true a statement is this in your experience?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

Suggestions:

1. Read an article or book about Cardinal Bernardin's life and death. See when you can identify your experience with his.
2. Send a note to someone who has recently experienced the death of a loved one. Base your note upon what you believe about death and resurrection.
3. Work with the Hospice group in your area to support the dying and their families. Contact the Visiting Nurses Association or a local hospital for information.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(As quiet instrumental music plays, the facilitator invites members to take the slips of paper that they put around the candle and to rest them in their open hands. When all are ready, the leader invites the group to respond, "We remember them" to the invocations that follow.)

Leader: In the rising of the sun and in its going down . . .

 In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter . . .

 In the opening of buds and in the warmth of summer . . .

 In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn . . .

 In the beginning of the year and when it ends . . .

 When we are weary and in need of strength . . .

 When we are lost and sick at heart . . .

 When we have joys we yearn to share . . .

 So long as we live, they too shall live
 for they are part of us and part of You, O God, as

All: We remember them.

Author Unknown

(Members take the slips of paper home with them as a reminder to pray for their dead and all who have died in the week ahead.)