MEMORIAL MASS HOMILY

Love Does Not End at the Grave

It is autumn outside, and winter is drawing near. The leaves have fallen. The gardens that were once full of color have grown quiet. The birds have flown south, and the warmth of summer has given way to the cold. There is a sadness to this time of year. Nature seems almost lifeless. And yet, we know something beautiful. Beneath the fallen leaves and frozen ground, life remains. We simply cannot see it. And when spring comes, the earth will blossom again. Perhaps that is why November is such a fitting time for the Church to remember and pray for those who have died. Because what we see happening in nature reflects something of what we experience in our own hearts.

When someone we love dies, something changes. There is an emptiness that wasn't there before. A familiar voice is missing. A chair at the table is empty. A telephone no longer rings with their name on the screen. Or that moment when something happens and we think, "I can't wait to tell them." And then we remember. **They are gone. And the ache returns.** Grief is the price we pay for having loved someone deeply. And when that love was great, the absence can feel enormous. Tonight, many of you have come here carrying a story. Some of you said goodbye almost a year ago. For others, the pain is still very fresh. But grief does not follow a calendar. Just when you think you are doing better, a memory comes along and brings the tears all over again. And that is all right.

When Jesus stood before the tomb of His friend Lazarus, Scripture tells us simply: "Jesus wept." Even knowing that He would raise Lazarus, Jesus wept. Our tears are not a failure of faith. They are the language of love. And the Lord who wept at His friend's grave understands every tear we bring here tonight. But He offers us something more than understanding. He offers us hope. Jesus died, and Jesus rose again. Death did not have the final word over Him. And because of Him, death need not have the final word over those we love.

That is why we gather around this altar. We do more than remember our loved ones: we entrust them to God's mercy. Our Catholic faith teaches us that our prayers can help those who have died. We pray especially for those being purified for Heaven—we call this Purgatory—trusting that God's love will complete the beautiful work He began in them. When we offer this Mass, it is a sign of our love for them. For death changes the way we love someone. But it does not mean we must stop loving them.

And tonight, we pray for ourselves too. There is a weariness that comes from missing someone, a tiredness that sleep cannot always cure. People say time heals all wounds. But what gives the Christian heart courage is something deeper than time. It is hope. Hope that the grave is not the end. **Hope that God's mercy is greater than our weakness.** Hope that one day, through Christ, we may see the faces we have missed so terribly. Imagine that moment: a familiar smile, a beloved face, the joy of being together again. And this time, no more goodbyes.

So tonight, picture the person you have come to remember. Recall their smile, their kindness, the little things that made them who they were. And quietly pray: "Lord, I love them. I miss them. I place them in Your hands. Bring them home to You."

Outside, winter is coming. But spring will come too. And because Christ has risen, we dare to believe that love's story does not end at the grave. Tonight we remember. Tonight we grieve. Tonight we pray. But above all, tonight we hope.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.