

Homily for Requiem Mass for Anne Fuller RIP, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2019

*Annie gazed at the invisible Jesus whom now she stands before.*

Year after year, your Mum sat and stood and knelt in this church – in my time it was, if I remember rightly, always in the same bench - and she gazed forwards. What was she looking at? She was looking towards Jesus, patiently waiting for him to reveal himself to her.

Traditionally, Catholic churches are oriented towards the east. Hence at Mass the congregation are gazing towards the place where the sun rises. This is because in the earliest traditions of the Church Jesus is described as the Rising Sun who will never set, he who rose from the dead and who now will never die again.

Just by turning up each week, as she did so religiously, Annie was testifying to her faith in her Risen Lord. She disposed herself during the course of her life to receive encouragement from her Beloved Jesus. She was confident that he would never let her down. Nor did he.

In this church Jesus spoke to her through the scriptures which were read out at Mass. He spoke to her personally, helping her to grow in faith and to be his true disciple, a witness to the saving truth of the gospel, not least within her own family. In this church, Jesus, who is invisible, manifested himself to her in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. More he gave himself to her, his whole self, his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, to express his enduring love for her.

Now, Jesus who is invisible to us, as we heard in our first reading, but who shows himself to us through sacramental signs, reveals himself in the fullness of his majesty to our deceased sister. He who hanged upon the cross for her, his hands cruelly nailed to the tree, extends his hands toward her in a tender gesture of welcome. The hands continue to bear the marks of the nails. These holes are the abiding proof of his desire to rescue Annie from that death which he in dying has vanquished.

As, on Calvary, he approached the moment of his death, unspeakable pain coursing through his tortured limbs, he cried out, as we heard in our gospel reading, "I am thirsty." His words may seem unsurprising. No doubt, having suffered as he had and the day being at its hottest, he was severely dehydrated. However, in the gospel of John all Jesus' sayings have a rich theological meaning which we need to unpack if we are to understand the full import of what Jesus wishes to say to us today. Jesus is thirsty, as the

Catechism of the Catholic Church so beautifully articulates it, that we might thirst for him. His death is not just a brutal close to his earthly life which demonstrates his love for us. His dying represents an appeal to us to *respond* to his love for us.

We can never look at a crucifix merely as a spectator or as somebody who is interested in the artistic merit of the work before us. The crucifix is a sacramental, a sign through which Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, is seeking to intervene in our lives. Do you want to live your life without reference to God, doing your own thing, working things out by yourself? Then don't go into a church. If you kneel in this church and courageously look up at the giant crucifix on this apse wall, you will be entering into a silent conversation with the invisible Crucified and Risen Jesus who says to you with a power beyond our comprehension, "I love you" and as soon as those words penetrate our hearts we can never be the same again.

Your mother raised her eyes to Jesus in this way and little by little her life was transformed. Here she was able to unite her suffering with that of Jesus when her beloved husband, Anthony and her beloved daughter, Amanda died. Here, proudly, she brought her three surviving children that they might receive the full benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection through the celebration of all the sacraments of initiation, Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Here she came without fail in order to petition her gentle Lord for all the members of her family as they sought to engage with the challenges that life threw up for them. And here we have placed her body, before the Paschal Candle, the sign of Jesus' victory over death, as we humbly but confidently commend our sister to the mercy of Jesus' Father, of our Father.

My brothers and sisters, Annie had to endure her own portion of suffering at the end of her earthly life, but now her participation in Jesus' crucifixion is over. Standing before her beautiful Lord, who is her Saviour before ever he is her Judge, her pain is forgotten. It is no longer of any account. Now she is simply very glad to be where she is – in the company of Jesus – and at the same time she is very conscious that she needs to be purified of her sins in order that she might, in the words of St Paul in our first reading, be able to bear the "full weight of the glory" of life without end in God the Blessed Trinity. In this moment, more than ever before, she needs our prayers, because God who in his greatness can save our sister without us chooses to rescue her precisely in response to our heartfelt petitions on her behalf. So we show our continuing affection for our sister very simply by praying for her, she who, for

so many years, made a precious offering of prayer for all of us within the holy Sacrifice of the Mass in this church which she loved.