

SERMON 933

Third Week of Easter

Saturday, April 25, 2015

The Burial of Nicholas Browder Weldon

994th Week as Priest

821st Week at St Dunstan's

86th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

DEATH BE NOT PROUD

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

We love our children in a way that is like no other. We would willingly give our own life for theirs. Without a second thought. Without any hesitation. And we would make any sacrifice for them to be happy, or safe, or healthy. And we would give anything for them to live a long and productive life. And to have children and grandchildren of their own. There is simply no limit, no boundary to what we would do for love.

And that, dear friends, is precisely why the death of a child is the very worst that can happen to a parent, a mother or father. "No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief," wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins, who had no child of his own and knew not the grief we have felt

over the death of a child, the despair that Jim and Celia know, the dread darkness that surrounds them.

We love our grandchildren, if it be possible, even dearer and more tenderly than this. For a grandson is purest delight! He is beyond all joy and comfort. He is our everything, our all in all. And each smile, each happy word that comes from his mouth is for us peace and bliss and possibility of high heaven come down from great height to dwell among us. We can recall his first words, his smile, his laughter, time spent in our home and on adventures, places we went together, as if those glorious times would never pass away, as if they would be with us for ever and ever.

But now, most suddenly, he is gone. Wrenched from our arms, pulled from our grasp, taken too soon, too quickly, and we are left alone in a sodden and impenetrable grief.

How can our loving God allow such a terrible and horrific thing to happen? Isn't there a reasonable limit to what we must bear, what loss we must endure? Lord God, loving Father, spare thou those who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent. Can we not undo this awful consequence? Will you, Lord, not give us back our child? Do you not love us as your own children,

and would you not, somehow, deliver us from this awful moment, this terrible loss, this death?

But then we remember. This God we worship is a Father himself, and he himself had a son, his only Son, in whom he lived and moved and had his being. And this child grew to be a young man, beloved of all who knew him, gracious and true in all his ways. And this Jesus, the Son of God, met an untimely death.

And then we remember that we are still in the season of Easter. This Jesus—he who loved us and gave himself for us—was himself a child. Born of Mary. Beloved of his parents. Raised in hope and strength to become a young man. He held in his hands all possibility and past and present and future. He brought to us a fullness of time, a moment in which we see that death is not the final toll of the bell. The grave is not the final resting place.

John Donne was a priest of the Church of England, the dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, the vicar of St. Dunstan's in-the-West, a masterful poet and author of holy sonnets. Donne wrote of this very aspect of the human condition, the fact of death, which seems final and hopeless, and yet is not the end of all things:

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

No, in Christ death is conquered. In him we are given eternal life. Through him we are reborn to a new and holy existence. And with him we will stand in the presence of God the Father, with all the company of heaven, with Angels and archangels and all the saints in light.

So I tell you, dear friends, that this day our son Nicholas Weldon is with him in Paradise. We grieve our loss--of that truth make no mistake. But we are assured, in a certain and most holy hope, that Nick has been

welcomed into the courts of heaven, and that one day our day will come.

I cannot tell you how I know this. But I assure you: Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life. And in him--who was the only Son of the Father--we are made whole and holy. We are redeemed and made glad. And we too will be welcomed home by our loving Father. AMEN.

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