

**It is very difficult to be entirely focused on the big issues of Life after death, reincarnation, purgatory, whether Spiritualism is true and what are benefits of going to Confession, when a very good bottle of Chateau Margaux red wine has been put on the table – at 3 o'clock in the afternoon!**

**But that was my experience recently when I went to talk to a family who had recently been bereaved so that we could begin to prepare for the funeral. I am not saying that the clink of glasses often happens during a pastoral visit and no doubt I should have refused the offer; but an hour and three quarters later I had been able to discuss very amiably with that family, quite a lot of what the Christian faith has to teach us about death, about heaven, and even something about the reality of hell.**

**But first, of course, we had shared together something of the pain that each and every death inflicts on us – for nothing quite takes our breath away, nothing else quite forces its way into our routine pattern of living, like the passing of someone close. As the opening line of our first reading reminds us: *My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, 'Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord.'* Why this, why now, why should it happen to them – and indeed to me?**

**And once we have begun to open Pandora's box, we discover all kinds of questions come to mind – some of which were part of my recent conversation. It wouldn't be unfair to suggest that many, many people have a rather exotic view of life after death – full of all kinds of weird and wonderful ideas they have picked up, mixing different world faiths and philosophies without a great deal of hard-nosed analysis.**

**They may make great topics for a dinner party or an evening at the pub, but do they actually make sense when a loved one has died? Do they help us to feel God's peace in the middle of the pain of losing someone we love?**

**The Christian feast of All Souls is a really important day in the calendar for a series of reasons. To begin with it gives us an annual occasion for remembering our loved ones, for returning to Church and recalling some of the warm and positive emotions that we felt at the time of their funerals. It is a time to give thanks for those we loved, to recall their gifts to us and to hold on to the notion that they are now at rest. But is that all we can say? Is that enough?**

**For many of us still have a hankering concern, famously expressed by a rich young man in Jesus' day: *what must I do to eternal life?* What do I need to do to do to get to heaven?**

**And the simple answer is the truest: nothing! There is nothing that any of us can do that will have any impact on our final destination. What, on other hand, we do need, is faith – faith and a complete trust in the Son of God who has taken our sins away and who has forgiven us for all our faults, long before we ever got round to asking for his forgiveness. That is what St Paul is telling us: it is the love of God, poured into our hearts, which is the ticket to heaven, not something that we can do for ourselves. On the other hand, learning to accept his love and resolving to change our lives accordingly takes a life-time and you and I are, hopefully, well grounded in that process of *metanoia*, that deep internal change of direction, which is the Christian life, the gift we give to God daily.**

**Of course we can fill up our time with all kinds of speculations - about spooks and spirits or the number of prayers it takes to get us through purgatory. But they are just diversions from the very simple truth, spoken in tonight's Gospel reading, that *everyone who hears the Word of God and believes, has eternal life.***

**As I hear the names of my own loved ones being read out, along with all of yours, I am happy to stick to the straightforward promise of Jesus: that God alone is their judge. We knew so little about those we recall tonight in comparison with what God knows about them, especially about how much faith they had. And so tonight Jesus invites us to err on the side of generosity so that, here, now, we can hear him saying about each of the Holy Souls: *the dead who hear the voice of the Son of God will live.* And it is that that should give us real comfort.**