

Like Sparks Through the Stubble

“At the round earth’s imagined corners, blow

Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise from death you numberless
infinities of souls ...”

So John Donne begins his seventh Divine Meditation. It is strangely active and noisy for a meditation on death. Rest, peace, and sleeping are all softer images of what we think death might be like, or what we hope it might be. And yet reading the passage from Wisdom one phrase has kept coming back to me, “they will run like sparks through the stubble.”

That to me speaks of activity not passivity. And in our Gospel, Jesus picks up this active theme. There are people coming to him, he himself comes down from heaven, and he will raise up those who come to him. More than that, he offers eternal life.

So Donne, having commanded the souls to rise continues, “to your scattered bodies go, All whom the flood did, and fire shall o’erthrow, All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies, Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes, Shall behold God, and never taste death’s woe.”

Here is activity, here is a picture of every soul being raised, as Jesus promised in the Gospel, and here as we listen to Donne's imagery are we reminded of souls running like sparks through the stubble.

If our hope of a resurrection means anything, if we don't see death as the end, then there is that hope of action, of being raised with Christ to reign with him. Our hope for the resurrection, our hope for eternal life is a hope for action.

And yet, like Donne, we might say "But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space." We need the time and the space to mourn "here on this lowly ground," as Donne puts it. But even in our perhaps passive mourning and grief we can be active.

We can remember, we can give thanks and we can pray for those we have loved and see no longer. Not just tonight or at occasions like this, but every day, every time we pass an open church, every time we visit a grave or a memorial, every time we light a candle. Acts of remembrance at birthdays and anniversaries, major sporting events or other calendar highlights. This evening I am wearing the cufflinks from one of my

grandfathers and have the wedding ring of the other to be made into a ring for me to wear. And as I do so I remember them, I give thanks for the different ways they shaped me and pray for their rest and their peace in the hope of their very active, knowing them, resurrection.

But more than that, we can remember, give thanks and honour them by living. When Jesus promises eternal life in our Gospel reading he's not just talking about the resurrection, he's not just talking about after death, he's talking about now, life before death.

Donne again in his meditation picks this up, "For if above all these, my sins abound, 'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace, When we are there; here on this lowly ground, Teach me how to repent; for that's as good As if thou hadst sealed my pardon, with thy blood."

We are allowed to live here on this lowly ground. More than that, we are called to live life in all its fullness, to somehow find our way back from the mourning and grief and live our lives to remember and honour those gone before while we pray for them.

As we come to this Sacrament, this Eucharist, so we are held in the hand of our loving God, so we, like the souls of the righteous, are held by Christ and not lost.

Through remembrance, through giving thanks, through praying,
through living our lives, we, in communion with those we love and see
no more, will run like sparks through the stubble.