

I grew up in Watervliet, down in Port Schulyer,  
And the *center* of my community –  
Along with my family and my *friends'* families –  
Was Saint Brigid's Parish –  
We went to St. Brigid's *School* up through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.  
I remember the Sisters of St. Joseph teaching us,  
The *spiritual* and *corporal* works of *mercy*.  
And the one that most *clearly* applies *today* – on All Souls' Day –  
Is our call to *bury the dead*.  
When I was in *grade* school –  
I didn't *like* this one.  
Bury the *dead*?!  
Don't they have *people* to do that?!  
Of course I was being too *literal*!  
To bury the dead is a work of mercy  
That participates in *God's* great mercy.  
In *all* aspects of life –  
*Including* care for those who have *died* –

God wants us to be *involved*.

In fact, He calls us to be living and breathing *extensions* of Christ's presence here and now.

So, we *pray* for the souls of those who have gone before us.

Charity begins at *home* –

So, we pray for *our* loved ones –

But, we *also* pray for *ALL* souls throughout the *world* –

And not just those who passed *this* year –

But in *ALL* years.

And – *like* God –

We are called to give loving attention to the most *vulnerable* among us.

*That's* why we pray for those whose *faith* in the resurrection is *weak*;

And we pray for those souls who *have* no one to *pray* for them by *name*.

In *this* way –

We *unite* ourselves to the love of *Christ*.

Jesus who was *moved* with pity,

And *raised* the poor widow-of-Nain's *son* from the dead.

Our loving and faithful prayers lift up *all* souls to their heavenly *inheritance*.

And it lifts up *our* souls *too* –

*Uniting* our hearts to those who've gone *before* us.

It keeps them *alive* in our hearts.

So *pray* for the dead –

That they may be *touched* by Jesus – and truly *live*.

The world of *materialists* –

Those who believe there *is* no value *beyond* what can be weighed and *measured* –

*Beyond* an existence they see as *finite* –

And a death they see as *final* –

*These* folks look at the Christian faith as *foolish!*

But even in *this* life –

How can we taste and measure and dissect *love*?

Is the human person *not* something *more* than some program of biochemical reactions?

Is not a *marriage* more than a *business* deal or an arrangement for social security?

Are the *jobs* we do something *more* than a means to put *food* into our bellies –

But a way to *love* those we *provide* for –

And to offer us a sense of self-worth and greater *purpose*?

And *despite* the greatest *scientific* observations –

Is not the birth of a baby something that is *still* miraculous?

May we *cling* to our faith in Christ.

May we *not* sell out on our *birthright* –

The grace of *adoption* into *His* life –

Which is *eternal*.

The *peace* He speaks of is an experience of being made *complete* in Him.

And our lives on earth now are a great journey *into* that *completion*.

Where we become our *fullest* selves –

Where there *is* no more suffering or loss –

But only *love* remains.

In *baptism* – we *already* died – died to death's *power* over us.

And in *baptized* into Christ's death, we also *Rise* with Him.

We *grieve* the loss of loved ones.

And so we *should*, and we *shall*.

For it is the *natural* expression of a heart that has *loved*.

But *trust* that *God* grieves *too*.

*All* the way to the *cross*.

*All* the way to *hell* and back again –

To *embrace* those who would *let* Him.

*Cling to faith in Christ who calls to us: Arise!*

In our *prayers* for the dead, we *join* Christ Who opens the gates of heaven –

Opening wide the gates of our *hearts*.

*Arise* to *other* Catholic traditions that many may *overlook* –

Like making an *offering* to the Church –

Asking them to offer a *Mass* for our deceased loved ones.

As a *child*, I remember going with my family up route 32 –

and over to North *Troy* on a special Sunday.

It was the anniversary my uncle's *death*.

I never *knew* him –

But I *saw* how *important* he was to the people important to *me*.

*So* important we *remember* him at the Mass –

and then we have brunch with his immediate family.

And so, he *lives* – he lives in our *remembering* –

And certainly in the grace of baptism into eternal life.

I was *also* raised seeing my parents get *Mass Cards* –

Getting *Mass* offerings in the name of a newly deceased –

And *give* that to the loved ones –

*Especially* taking the time to pay condolences at the *wake* or at the *funeral*.

And the *highest* form of prayer for the dead *is* the funeral *Mass*.

*Period*.

Do not sell *out* on our *inheritance*.

*Enter* the funeral Mass as if walking through the gates of *heaven*.

The Christian life is *not* foolish for *loving* as *Christ* loves –

Even to the point of *suffering* for love of them.

But with a *tender* heart –

*Strengthened* by an abiding *faith* in our *share* in Christ's resurrection –

He calls to *each* of us: *Arise!*