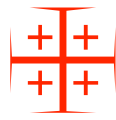


HIGH MASS OF
REQUIEM ON ALL
SOULS' DAY

2 NOVEMBER, 2022



THE CHAPEL OF
PUSEY HOUSE

OXFORD


The Widener Burying-Ground

In spite of all the learned have said,
We hear the voices of the dead.
Not scholiasts who like Burke and Hare
Turn dead leaves in the living air,
Unlock the Essay and exhume
Philosophy from its dry tomb,
Nor wise embalmers of the text
In humble or perplexed,
Carved, interlaced half-calf, who come
To show how gold they are, and dumb--
We strike from silent lines a fire.
Troped sea-shell, loud Æolian liar,
Nymph-haunted cave and mountain peak
Choir with voices that we seek
As, scholars of one candle-end,
We hear the hush of dusk descend.
We unfired vessels of the day,
Built of a soft, unechoing clay,
Grow obdurate of ear at night
When images of voice are bright;
The dreamingale, the waterlark,
Within the present, silent dark
Echo the burden (on these stairs
Mistranslated) the singer bears—
He who packs, with a glowing faith,
In one portmanteau, fame and death.
Our marginalia all insist
— Beating the page as with a fist
Against a silent headstone— that
The dead whom we are shouting at,
Though silent to us now, have spoken
Through us, their stony silence broken
By our outcry (*We are the dead*
Resounding voices in our stead)
Until they strike at us, once more,
Whispers of their receding shore,
And Reason's self must bend the ear
To echoes and allusions here.

John Hollander

Wisdom 3. 1-9 / 1 Thessalonians 4. 13-18 / John 11. 21-27

Yet is their hope full of immortality....

 In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – *Amen*

*In spite of all the learned have said
We hear the voices of the dead.*

IN SIXTEEN SPARE SYLLABLES, John Hollander captures for us the heart of All Souls Day. Indeed, this couplet *aptly* characterises the impulse that brings us *here*, to the altar of the living God, day on day, week on week, Easter on Easter: We gather at least in part to share the words that our mum and dad, our grandpa, our nanny, our school chaplain taught us and engraved in our hearts. As we sing their hymns, recite their prayers, confess their faith, we hear not only our own voices, not only our *neighbours* and our *priests'* voices, but the voices of King David, of St Athanasius, of Cranmer, of St John as well, who bequeathed to the church an inheritance that centuries of the faithful could share. *I* did not write the *Dies Irae*; Fr George did not compose 'Jerusalem the Golden'; *you* all did not produce the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. In all these cherished portions of our liturgy, we may hear *proximately* the voices of the visible, audible congregation here gathered — but we hear *also* the voices of all the faithful who have shared in millennia of prayer, of our *common* prayer.

Even in what might seem the most variable element of each observance of our eucharistic liturgy, even in the homily itself, we hear not exclusively the *preacher's* voice. Tonight, you hear the voice of my father-in-law preaching. You hear my mother's poetic and graphical imagination in the tropes and figures the homily marshals; you hear

my father if you find wry amusement in some particular turn of phrase. When I lecture, I speak with the voices of the many professors who formed my listening and thinking, most of whom remain until now (as the Apostle saith), though some have fallen asleep. When we hearken to the homilist's voice, we hear also the voices of the *many, many* humble and unknown proclaimers of God's word who have enriched our spirits with striking insights, with compelling images, with heart-striking profundity. Gathering for worship, we hear the voices of the dead, and we come *here... especially to this chapel...* to hear voices that resound through the centuries.

That determined, acute listening for the voices of the dead characterises also the reasons that bring many of us, I dare say *most* of us, to the University of Oxford as well. Our studies of History, Classics, Anthropology, in PPE, yea, sometimes in *Theology* direct our attention to the voices of the dead. Even our studies that involve the latest up-to-the-moment experimental research in physics, chemistry, biology, epidemiology, even in labs and clinics, our studies rest upon and engage with the voices of past researchers. We carry on the work of our mentors — or we build new models to remedy oversights that have been *structured into* conventional reasoning. More urgently still, our studies here *answer* the voices of those who have died through our *ignorance*, our *errors* of judgement, our mistaken assumptions, our malformed policies; we hear the dead imploring us to adopt wiser, sounder, *truer* applications of medicine, technology, algorithms, infrastructure. The austere citadels of unadulterated Reason always rest on ground prepared by philosophers and scientists who have gone before, and with those forerunners our modern studies join poets, archivists, historians, political theorists, and classicists in a restless interrogation of what we know, and have known, and may someday expect to know. Under whatever banner, we are probing for Truth, as

have eight hundred years of departed faithful scholars, whose words we read, whose voices we hear in Hall and seminar and reading-room.

For what is the kingdom of heaven like, and to what shall we compare it? The kingdom of heaven is like a vast library, with branches and tunnels and off-site storage, in which are remembered and preserved all the thoughts and deeds of our teachers and pastors, our mothers and fathers, our caregivers and those for whom we care. That library comprises more witnesses than we can imagine, in a greater diversity of wisdom and folly, of piety and depravity, than we can *ourselves* reconcile to what we *know* of the truth. But our librarians do not judge simply by appearances; they know that the devout ascetic may be wicked to her housekeeper, or the gluttonous tippler a charitable benefactor. In the compendious library of creation, written in millions of languages we will never learn, bespeaking the interests of all manner of creatures, nonetheless comes together, in God's good provision, a resolution of opposites that only the Almighty, only the All-Wise could orchestrate.

Despite this, we've been trained not to perceive the presence of the dead among us. People *have to be* trained to *un-*perceive the ongoing influence and effects of the departed, because we know in our hearts that we most readily feel and hear and sometimes even *see* the departed abiding among us. We who pack, with a glowing faith, in one portmanteau, fame and death, acknowledge that the angels and demons, the unicorns and dragons described in Scripture tell more of the truth about reality than we can capture in acid-base titrations and party manifestos; such a glowing faith shall shine, and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble, illuminating the souls of the faithful, and by the light of faith we perceive what our modern cult of instrumental Reason obscures from us.

This state of affairs explains a great part of the appeal of gothic

fantasy: that genre takes for granted what we as moderns dare not believe, that more is going on than meets the eye, that we do not escape the company of people separated from us by miles, by centuries, by generations, by the heedless hand of malign circumstance (and all without the embarrassment of, you know, *religious faith*). The literature of fantasy encourages us to envision, to explore what it means that we are *in fact* always already unstuck in time. I began preparing to become a university lecturer, despite my initial resistance to the idea, partly from my grandfather's teaching before I was born, partly the ineluctable impression of the teaching *vocation* that my father and my mother made on me. Unstuck from the present moment, they stand alongside me, and I confer with them, as I instruct my colleagues yonder at Regent's Park about the Letter to the Romans. I bring my father's father with me to my Oriel chapel services and tutorials, wearing his secondary school class ring (North Canaan, Connecticut, 1917). I inhabit the world of my grandmother's paintings as I leave my home in the morning and when I return at night. *We all* gather here under the ægis of Edward Bouverie Pusey, accompanied by throngs of his Tractarian supporters. We immerse ourselves in our studies to acquaint ourselves more richly with innumerable faithful souls who speak to us in this library of deliberation and memory and proclamation, and for whom we in turn offer our voices. All these dear faithful souls, though silent to us now, have spoken through us. *We live in their world*, and they in ours, and all this not in the attenuated sense of mere memory and affection, but in palpable effects and audible expression.

And if all this is true in a temporal world where everything is passing away, where we unfired vessels of the day, built of a soft, unechoing clay, nonetheless resonate with the voices of our forebears — if we are less firmly stuck into the present moment than instrumental productivity and efficiency demand that we be — *how*

much greater and more wonderful the truth of our continuity with the faithful departed in glories yet to come? These temporal signs of the faithful ones' hope, full of immortality, are but the first-fruits of the marriage-feast of the Lamb that brings us to immortality itself; *these* are echoes and allusions rung into a time-stuck world by a divine Love that surpasses what we can ask or imagine. The cacophony of contesting clamour in the shelves of our great libraries only hints by contrast at the celestial *harmony* of the faithful souls in that great multitude, which no man could number, of every tribe, and nation, and people, and language, who stand before the throne, and before the Lamb. We who are obdurate of ear, scholars of one candle-end, perceive only obscure shadows when the hush of dusk descends — but the immortal hope that *does not disappoint* will bring us, with all the faithful departed, into the clear daylight of the divine Presence.

Aspiring then to be counted among the innumerable voices who sing God's eternal praises, we *prepare best* to join that company of All Souls by sharing in their growth toward eternity. Living as one among them, we can measure our stride by their steps before us, attuned to the procession of the saints who lead us on. We *acknowledge* them and today we *remember* them, not out of a grief born from loss, but with a constant view to their *hope*, which stretches from before our knowing to beyond our anticipating. Gathering tonight in this House of memory and proclamation, we honour the faithful departed with prayer and intercession, listening acutely to their voices and learning to *become* them, to become the faithful ones to whom our successors will look in hope, and always, always learning to follow more closely the faithful ones in their glorious procession to immortality.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit —

Amen