

Remembering those we have lost but still love

All Souls

To hold someone in heart and mind in prayer before God is to reflect the intimacy and a knowing that goes beyond words. It is in essence to reflect a certain 'holding in love' which we experienced ourselves, when the one whom we loved, but see no longer, walked with us, and shared with us, in the lifegiving task of holding together. This 'holding' is something that we first experienced for ourselves when we were still in the womb, held by our mother's love. Held also - at all times - in the good mother's heart and mind. 'Holding' is to know what it is to be held always in the parent's heart, with feeling, and to be never far from the lover's mind.

To be held in the womb is to be held in the dark, the dark which expresses the unknown and which raises the anxiety of what the not-knowing might mean – the question of doubt. What happens beyond the womb is yet to be known. And yet despite the darkness of the womb and the unknowingness of life in a world of light that is yet to be – there is the ever-holding that reassures that somehow all will be well. It is true that not every child that is given birth to is born with eyes wide upon and with lungs gasping for the first breath. Some babies, sadly, are born never to know this. But every miracle of life that has developed beyond the first mix of biological chemistry has experienced something of what it means to be held. And what it means for the mother to hold.

In the depths of our despair, that comes with the separation caused by the death of a loved one, we are reminded, often very painfully, of what it means to hold and what it means to have been held. To no longer be able to hold the one we have loved, to no longer be the arm that comforts the child - now lost to us; to no longer be able to reassure the husband or wife - who has meant more than any words can say; to no longer be able to be held by those arms of a partner - that has been so life-giving for so life-long – is to know the importance of what it is to feel secure in love. And to know the cost of that love in death. The painful separation of bereavement is to return to the darkness of the unknowing.

And yet. Love continues to nurture. Death does not mean a collapse into a clumsy state of forgetfulness. Slowly we turn to realise for ourselves that the love we have shared, even its memory, has a capacity to hold. Life itself does of course change – but the experience of being held and holding continues to linger long into the darkness of separation. A thankfulness for you being the person that you were and of all that we shared – no matter how long or how brief. In the words of John's Gospel, "I should lose nothing of all that has been given to me." In this holding of memory – the holding of all that you meant and will continue to mean to me – because I held you – and you held me. This painful and yet also comforting holding articulates, often without words, that death does not mean that my love for you has died. It is more that I must now learn to live with holding you in my heart and in my

mind without being able to hold you in my arms. But still, I hold you - and in holding you, I know - and I feel you holding me. You live on in the quiet darkness of my inner being – always.

And so, the flame of the candle that we light reflects not just a name, but also a capacity that we have, and which we share, to hold beyond death those whom we have loved and continue to love – always.

“I lose nothing of all that has been given to me...” I continue to love, and to care, and to treasure... and I ask of God, that in his hands you will be forever gently held, and I will be held too, until such time as we shall be together again.

May those whom we hold continue to rest in peace.

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