Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ
https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/

Commemoration of the faithful departed / All Souls' Day

Date: Sunday, November 2, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Wisdom of Solomon 4:7–15
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1–6 | **Response:** Psalm 23:1
Second Reading: Romans 5:5–11
Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 25:34
Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:1–12a
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

The readings today are about the quiet courage of hope that endures through death, the unseen thread of mercy that binds the living and the dead, and the promise that even in the shadowed valley, goodness and love are not far behind.

Dear friends in Christ,

Yesterday, we celebrated the triumph of the saints—those luminous souls who now behold the face of God. Today, the tone softens. The bright blaze of sainthood gives way to the quiet vigil of memory, as we keep watch with the faithful departed. These are the ones on the threshold, in that tender mystery we call purgatory—not as a place of punishment, but of preparation; not fire and brimstone, but the refining flame of love. This is not a day of despair. It is a day of deep, deliberate hope.

In our first reading, from the Book of Wisdom, we are told that the just person, even if they die young, finds rest. “Because grace and mercy are with his chosen.” What a strange claim to make, especially in a world like ours—where the graves are often dug too early, where the soil of Zimbabwe still holds the bones of those taken by cholera, by poverty, by injustice, by preventable death. In our land, we know all too well the sting of premature departure, the ache of empty chairs. And yet, here Scripture whispers: do not look only with your eyes. The life that seems brief may, in God’s gaze, be complete. Death, in the wisdom of God, is not the end but a doorway. And God, we are told, “took them quickly, lest wickedness pervert their mind.” We hear not the voice of judgment, but of

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-11nov-02-yc-ot-as/

protection. A God who shelters the soul before it can be scarred. A God who gathers the fragile, not as a thief, but as a father drawing a child from a burning house.

This is a reading for parents who have buried children. For widows, for siblings, for those who grieve what might have been. It is not an explanation, but a promise: your grief does not go unheard.

Psalm 23, perhaps the most beloved of all, teaches us to walk with faith through the shadows. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me.” The Hebrew word here for “shadow of death” is *tsalmavet*—a word that carries not only the idea of darkness but of looming uncertainty. It is the shadow that stretches across a hospital room, across a war-torn village, across a nation trembling under inflation and inequality. In Zimbabwe, we walk through that shadow often. And yet—this Psalm does not promise escape from the valley, but companionship in it. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Even here, in the shadows, God sets the table. Even now, the oil of gladness is poured on our heads. The dead are not alone, and neither are we.

St Paul, writing to the Romans, gives us the sturdy scaffolding of Christian hope. He does not dress it up. He names the truth plainly: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Not when we were holy. Not when we were ready. But while we were fumbling in our faults, covered in the mud of selfishness and sin, Christ stretched out his arms and embraced us. And if his death reconciled us, how much more will his life save us? This is not a conditional love. It is not rationed, or reserved. It is reckless and sure. Paul says, “Hope does not disappoint.” In a society where promises are often empty, and hope can feel like a luxury the poor cannot afford, this is a hope backed by blood. Not sentiment, but sacrifice.

And then we come to Matthew’s Gospel, where Jesus, seeing the crowds, climbs the hill and sits—just as Moses once did on Sinai—and begins to speak a new law. But this law is not carved in stone. It is spoken into the wounds and hopes of those gathered before him. He blesses not the comfortable but the cracked open. Not the triumphant but the tender-hearted.

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-11nov-02-yc-ot-as/

“Blessed are the poor in spirit… blessed are those who mourn… blessed are the meek.” These are not fancy words. They are real. We see them in the woman who keeps going, even when she has nothing. In the man who works quietly for his family. Jesus speaks these blessings from right here, in the middle of our struggles.

In African tradition, the ancestors are not distant figures of the past—they are present, walking with us, woven into the fabric of family, land, and memory. Today, as we hear these Beatitudes, we remember that many of our ancestors lived them without ever hearing them named. They were poor in spirit, yet rich in generosity. They mourned without bitterness. They showed mercy in quiet ways. They cultivated peace in places of conflict. Many never saw their names printed in a book, yet their stories live on in us—through the choices we make, the prayers we offer, the love we pass down.

These are the ones we remember today. Not because they did great things the world noticed, but because they lived honestly and stayed faithful in small, quiet ways. They worked, they prayed, they forgave. They carried burdens without praise. The Gospel is not far away from them. It is not only about heaven one day—it is about the grace already growing here, in the middle of our daily efforts, because of their example.

So how do we live this feast, this commemoration of all the faithful departed? Not by fearing death, nor fleeing from grief, but by standing in the valley with candles in our hands and prayers on our lips. This day is not just for remembering the dead; it is for reaffirming the bonds that death cannot break. We call this the Communion of Saints. And the word *communion* matters—it means union with. We are not separated from our beloved dead, but united to them, through Christ, through prayer, through love stronger than the grave.

Catholic Social Teaching reminds us that human dignity is not lost in death. The poor, the abandoned, the unknown—those whose names are forgotten by history but remembered by God—are ours to remember today. And here, a challenge arises. If we believe in the dignity of every person, then our care must extend beyond our own graves. In Zimbabwe, where too many die with no one to mourn them, can we build a culture where no death is anonymous? Can we honour not just those with marble tombstones, but those whose names are written only in the heart of God?

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-11nov-02-yc-ot-as/

In the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, we are invited to contemplate our own death—not morbidly, but truthfully. What legacy shall I leave? Who will pray for me? What kind of soul am I becoming? These are not questions to be postponed. They are the beginning of wisdom.

Today, I invite you to remember the souls not only of your parents and your mentors, but of those whose stories were cut short. The mother who died in childbirth. The man lost to addiction. The child buried without a name. Light a candle for them. Speak their names, if you know them. If not, offer your silence as prayer. For in the mystery of the Body of Christ, your prayer becomes their peace.

And let us not forget what our ancestors taught us: that the dead are not gone. They are with us in the rains and in the firelight. In the memory of bread shared and burdens borne. In the Beatitudes lived without a name. And so we come back to the image that unites all the readings: the valley. The valley of mourning, the valley of waiting, the valley of hope. We do not dwell in the heights today, but in the hollow where love deepens. Where roots grow. Where the Shepherd walks. And it is there, in that valley, that we glimpse the promise: surely goodness and mercy shall follow us—not just in this life, but into the next.

Let us pray for the Holy Souls. Let us act for the living poor. And let us live, each day, with the quiet courage of those who know that mercy has the final word.

As we go forth, I invite you to reflect on these questions:

- When I imagine myself at the end of my life, what do I hope will be remembered about how I loved?
- Who are the forgotten souls I am called to pray for or honour today—those whose stories have been silenced or erased?
- How might I walk more consciously through “the valley,” not in fear, but in solidarity with others, trusting in the Shepherd who leads us all to peace?

Amen.

Source: https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-11nov-02-yc-ot-as/

This homily is shared for personal and pastoral use. Please attribute the author and do not alter the meaning when quoting. If you wish this homily to be translated - there is an option on the website which will allow you to translate it into the language of your choice.

Licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license.

The author does not speak for the Society of Jesus or for the Catholic Church.

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **WhatsApp**

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **Telegram**

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **Signal**

Scan for Website on **Clearnet**

Scan for Onion Mirror **via TOR**

In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.