

November 2, 2019 (All Souls' Day) Cemetery Cheer Homily: First, I must make a rather embarrassing confession. Not once have I seen an episode of the popular television series, "The Walking Dead". I should hope that you are not too disappointed! I simply do not find horror films very appealing. Nevertheless, I wish to make one observation. Scary movies are usually not complete without at least one scene in a haunted cemetery. Consider films of the recent past in which the cemetery is an important component of the story: "Return of the Living Dead", "Cemetery Man", "Pet Cemetery", "Beetle Juice" and the most notable of all, "Frankenstein". In these films the cemetery, often covered over by fog or mist, is a place inhabited by zombies, vampires, ghosts, witches and rabid dogs. Death seems to have the upper hand and there is no hint of a new, resurrected life beyond the grave. Most horror films seem to reflect a pagan outlook on life and death. It is the resting place where hope dies. Cemeteries are to be avoided.

In the Catholic Church, the month of November is dedicated to offering prayers for the dead. On the second of November, the feast of All Souls' is celebrated. It is a special day of remembering. It is customary on the day of the feast to visit the graves of our ancestors, our parents, family and friends. Visiting cemeteries allows us to renew our bonds with our loved ones who have left us. The retired Pontiff, Benedict XVI reminds us that there is a close link between those who walk upon this earth and our countless brothers and sister who have already reached eternity. "Burial places" says Benedict, "are a kind of assembly, in which the living meet the dead and reaffirm the bonds of communion that death was unable to stop". We need not fear visiting the graves of our loved one. We can be comforted by their nearness to us.

A story: Several years ago, I was responsible for maintaining the Catholic cemetery, Mt. Olivet, in Frankfort, New York. While visiting the cemetery one evening I spotted someone near one of the many gravesites. Thinking that he might be a vandal I approached the person cautiously. I soon recognized him. He was a widower whose wife had only recently died. He was kneeling at the tomb of his wife, and praying for her. Given his age... he was an old man..., I was left momentarily stunned. The lesson I learned that one night is that nothing, not even death, can separate us from Christ and from each other. The darkness of death does not break the bonds I enjoy with those who have crossed over to the other side, eternity.

The Church has always considered prayers for the dead to be a noble and praiseworthy practice that implies belief in the Resurrection of the dead. Indeed, it is one of the seven Spiritual Works of Mercy.

In one of the Psalms of the Old Testament, the Psalmist acknowledges his fear of death and annihilation. He writes, "They surrounded me, the snares of death with the anguish of the tomb. They caught me, sorrow and distress so I called on the Lord's name". For the Christian the grave is the resting place of those dear to us, and who await the fulfillment of Christ's promise of the Resurrection of the Body.

"Memento mori" (Remember death) is a popular Christian proverb that is sadly forgotten today. But it serves to remind us that we are pilgrims on a journey and that in an hour known only to God, death will come to us all. However, our death is not the end of the story. As the empty tomb of Jesus reminds us, there is a place reserved for each of us in that Kingdom preached by our divine Lord, who, without fail, bears witness to the truth about everlasting life.

Amen!