

**Homily      32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Year (B)    Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.  
Remembrance Sunday – Requiem Mass**

**Mass Readings:    Wisdom 3:1-9;    Romans 14:7-12;    Luke 21:1-4.**

You may or may not have heard of Rosa Parkes. Rosa Parkes was a black American woman who lived near the town of Montgomery in the southern state of Alabama in the USA. You will have heard of Mikhail Gorbachev. Mikhail Gorbachev was, as we all know, the last Soviet President. When he was being interviewed sometime after the collapse of Soviet communism, he was asked which person had been the singular most striking influence on his life. And he replied that the person who had most inspired him over the years was the Polish Trade Union leader Lech Wałęsa. When the same question was on one occasion put to Lech Wałęsa, he said that the man who had most inspired him was the 1960s civil rights leader Martin Luther King. When Martin Luther King was once being interviewed, and a similar question was put to him, he said that the person who had been the most powerful inspiration for him was Rosa Parkes. Who was she? Rosa Parkes was, and to a large extent still is of course, an almost totally unknown woman, simply a wife, a grandmother. I don't know her job, her hobbies, anything really about her. All we do know of her is that one hot summer's day when she was travelling home and was very tired, she sat down at the front of a bus. The conductor told her to stand up and go to the back where blacks had to sit. She refused. The police were called and she was ejected from the bus and had to walk home. That promoted a widespread boycott of all buses by the black community in the state, which led to a financial crisis for the bus companies of course, and ultimately to the end of racial segregation on the buses. Rosa Parkes' courage was the catalyst for a widespread dynamic for social change in the USA. When Rosa sat down thousands stood up; such a simple action, by someone totally unknown. This woman out of her poverty gave all she had to live on. As Paul said in his letter to the Romans: "*The life and death of each of us has its influence on others.*"

I often want to say, and do say, to parents when I see their children, that they are a tribute to them. When you see children who are happy, confident, communicative, and obviously secure, it says something about them, but it says a great deal more about their parents, since all those qualities of life have to be nurtured in the home, and handed on. Behind those qualities there lies, on the parents' part, a lot of painstaking effort to do with assuring, disciplining, guiding, comforting, loving. In the children, then, the parents are *remembered*. It's the same with us as adults too of course. In us still, our parents are remembered. Not only our parents, but as our personal history extends, also our teachers, our friends, our work colleagues, all our relationships. In the way we are, they are remembered, for so much of us is the sum of our relationships.

You may never know, as a parent, where this might lead. Would Rosa's Mum and Dad, who inspired within her that particular type of determination, courage and dignity, that refused to be humiliated, ever have known what that might have helped to lead to – the collapse of the Soviet empire? In Rosa, her parents were remembered. In Martin Luther King, Rosa was remembered. In Lech Wałęsa, Martin Luther King was remembered. In Mikhail Gorbachev Lech Wałęsa was remembered. Most crucially, and it's why we are here now, in you Christ is remembered. "*Do this in memory, in remembrance, of me.*" (Luke 22:19) It's fundamental to our mission that He is remembered in us particularly in the most ordinary everyday aspects of our lives.

All of our life can, therefore, be seen as an act of remembrance. Remembrance is principally an expression of gratitude and responsibility. In our remembering we recall what has been given, and take up the responsibility to foster and enhance it in that unique way of which each of us is capable. A lot has been given by others so that you and I can be here this morning celebrating Mass, in the land we love, free from aggression and terror. A lot has been given by others enabling the faith of the Catholic Church to survive in Britain at all. I am sure you can think, as I can, many lights that have been placed in our hearts and minds and spirits, by those who have gone before us – family, friends, Church, nation, precisely so that you and I can be a beacon of light for others in our own day. Today, and in November, we remember them. In God they live, and in us too, through the deep and lasting impressions that they have made, they still live, and speak. For all of this our remembering takes the form of a deep gratitude. Thousands upon thousands of young men, our brothers and countrymen, were dismembered for the sake of a future for their families, and their country, and what they held dear, and for the sake of others who couldn't defend themselves. To re-member means to put together, to connect; and I particularly consider here the essential connection between gratitude and responsibility. The best form of gratitude and sorrow that I can express to those who lost their lives in the terrible wars of the last century, both civilian and military, of our own country and of those countries with whom we were in conflict, is to so live my own life, that the price they paid in favour of what they cherished, and what they wanted me to have the freedom to cherish also, has been fully honoured.

Remembering, as gratitude and responsibility, is a great work of healing. In this we turn to Christ, the great 'rememberer' of lives, who is Himself the first principal, the primary relationship, the fundamental person who seeks to be remembered in us, individually and as His body, the Church. He alone, and supremely, recalls each one of us to who we are. He reveals to us who we uniquely can become; only He most completely re-members us. He calls us, the Church, into being so that in seeing us, in being with us, and the Mass specifically celebrates this and enables it to be so, that people should have an experience of an essential truth, that they have not been forgotten, that they are remembered. We are, by our radical obedience to Christ and His Church, by our faithfulness to the Lord's teaching, having the gospel as our way of life simply lived each day, bringing honour and loving remembrance to those who have gone before us, especially those who lost everything so early in their own lives that we might have a future. Through our obedience to Christ we are also bringing hope and inspiration to those now all around us everyday, who are seeking a future worth having.

*"To have seen me is to have seen the Father."(John 14:9)*

In Jesus the Father is remembered.

*"People will know that you belong to me by the love you have for one another."(John 13:35)*

In us Jesus is remembered.

*"It is my Father's will that nothing of what He has given me should be lost, but that I shall raise it up on the last day."(John 6:39-40)*

Through Jesus being remembered in us, and in our responsible, joyful, daily, living out of that, others will come to know and see themselves as being remembered.

That is our mission, and our task here, which the Lord has entrusted to us. To fully develop our life here is the best and most honourable and eloquent way of remembering, of saying thank you.

Every time a black woman sits on a bus in the southern state of Alabama in a seat that she chooses, she embodies a particular freedom, gratitude and responsibility. She remembers that it is the little things held to bravely that can have the most outstanding and far reaching consequences. She must remember Rosa. Let that be our reflective thought for this week. *It is the small things, yet held to with a large heart, with great fidelity, responsibility, simple dignity, and courage, that are the most important.* There's the poor unknown widow in each of us. We may never know, in this life, who may secretly be inspired by them. We may never know in what wonderful manner, through them, Christ may be expressing Himself, letting Himself be remembered, and causing someone to come to find their true self.

The saints, those whom the Church daily remembers with gratitude, and whom we particularly remember during this month of November, are not people who have learnt to do extraordinary things, but very ordinary things, with extraordinary love. They do them with extraordinary simplicity, faith and hope. May we be counted among their number, and remembered in the lives of those who come after us.