

**3<sup>rd</sup> November, All Souls**

**Father Tim**

*“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*

Eternal life, when we think of this we are sometimes tempted to imagine what it will be like. There is plenty of fodder within books such as revelation and within art and culture – we can assured of spending eternity in the loving unbroken relationship with Father, Son and Holy spirit but how do we think about the outworkings of such a magnificent promise. Death to life – this eternal life is supposed to be a comfort but it's not a comfort that comes through clarity

The apostle Paul tells us - <sup>12</sup> *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.* This Scripture and tonight's Gospel point beyond Now to the promise of Then. It's on the other side of resurrection, then we shall see face to face. Now and then - Death and life are two distinct spheres. There is a border. On this All Souls Night we stand at the border and ponder about now and then: *Now* we stand in the darkness of grief but *Then* we will walk into the sunlight of resurrection.

This is an ancient celebration but still as relevant. The question of afterlife and eternity still permeates our discourse both religious and secular. Within culture and society now the subject of artificial intelligence is widespread. I recently watched a documentary called 'Eternal You' which is about the industry of digital afterlife. The documentary asks *'What if our loved ones could still talk to us long after their body has been cremated or is lying lifeless in the ground?'* The documentary shows how using AI and startups create avatars of deceased people to allow their loved ones to interact with them. They input data from old text messages and voice notes so that the AI predicts what their responses are to questions.

Predictably religion comes up, and perhaps this is a response to the failure of the church to inspire faith in a God who promises us eternal life. What is curious about this so-called eternal life is that it is not based on then but based on the now. This life. Data from old messages, old attitudes and ways of thinking and being. It predicts an eternal person based on the information of the past as it has no possible way of conceptualising the distinction between and now and then – the distinct sphere of death and life – it only has access of the now before death. One commentor calls this industry and what it offers *'thin gruel'*. I will let you watch the documentary and let you decide for yourselves. But what I will say is that God's eternity is not a sterile timelessness of repeating what that happens now. The future vision of the resurrected

Jesus offers is a far cry from what our technology and imaginations offer up - it's offers a whole lot more, it offers us something new. Eternal life is not simply to be a renewed sequence of the same sort of comings and goings that we experience here and now, but, while preserving that past, it is to be somehow wondrously more.

It will not be like an AI created future, based on relics of the past but an eternal abundance of new times. It will be so full and vivid, and unlike anything previous experience, so full of living joy that it is beyond us, it is beyond description. The comfort is that is infinitely better than we can possibly imagine. This is a promise. That we are and those who have crossed over from death to life are in his most gracious hands, totally dependent in his dependable love.

This is the Christ who offers us something infinitely better : *'Behold I make all things new'*

And so we face every painful Now in confident hope of God's Then.

Amen