

Donnybrook

2 November 2021

Welcome

A very close friend of mine once asked me, shortly after the death of her husband, where do I think her husband is?

Topic

This really good question made me go down at least three avenues of reflection.

Step

Firstly, for myself personally, I am content to say the dead "with the Lord", without being able to say anything more precise. In this rather simple answer, I am supported by St Paul himself, who once wrote:

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" – (1 Corinthians 2:9 NRSV)

Secondly, a Church of Ireland preacher put it very beautifully once: the child in the womb cannot imagine the next stage of existence – and yet, the child will leave the safety of the womb and discover a whole other wonderful world. In this life, we are like the child in the womb. Just because we cannot imagine what is to come does not make it less real.

Thirdly, in the Bible, we do find poetic presentations, such as our first reading this morning. The next stage will be a place of hospitality, of celebration, of victory over death because "on this mountain, he will remove the mourning veil coving all people, the shroud entrapping all nations, he will destroy death forever."

The one person who makes a consistent effort to imagine our resurrected life is St Paul in the marvellous chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. In a poetic way, St Paul compares Christ and Adam, as follows:

The first man is from the earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven. Like the one made of dust, so too are those made of dust, and like the one from heaven, so too those who are heavenly. And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the man of heaven.(1 Corinthians 15:47-49)

Even so, St Paul soon afterwards says "Behold I tell you a mystery."

Conclusion

Perhaps it is enough to know that all who have gone from us are in the hands of God and that God is love.