**The Parish of Saints Anthony & Aloysius**

74 Grange Road, Glen Huntly VIC 3163

Telephone: (03) 9569 2099

Email:glenhuntlycaulfield@cam.org.au

ABN: 70548 570 366

**Homily at Mass 31st Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B – 4 November 2018**

It’s Melbourne Cup Day on Tuesday: but the last couple of days have been significant days in the Catholic calendar: Thursday was All Saints Day and Friday was All Souls Day. We enter this last month of the Church’s year with our eyes fixed on Heaven. Heaven where God is, where God reigns in the song-filled company of the angels, and the joyful company of Our Lady and the saints. Heaven: a place of light and endless day; a place of joy, praise, worship, music, rest, peace, life.

From the life and joy of Heaven, our minds then turn to the dead who await Heaven. The dead are just a few steps ahead of us: We also await Heaven. This life is like a great pilgrimage towards one goal, one hope, one destiny: eternal life with God. The eternal life of each one of us began on the day we were baptised. Mum and dad conceived us in love. With love and faith they brought us to the church for baptism. With the water of baptism and the simple words given us by Christ :I baptise you …” our human life was transformed, changed, made new – we received the life of God, we begin to share his life, his endless life, eternal life. We began to live the life of grace, so that each day of our lives is filled with hope – the hope of Heaven.

The church holds to this hope, but she is realistic enough to know that human nature is fickle, prone to weakness and sin. Because of this you and I need a God who is merciful – for without divine mercy we could not hope in God, we could not trust him or his promises. The mercy of God does not abandon us in the moment of death. Rather God’s mercy in the experience of death has a name: we call it Purgatory. The word purgatory is our every day word ‘purge’ – cleanse, purify, heal, restore. Religious language uses the image of fire to describe this purgation, not a fire which burns and destroys, but rather a fire that purifies gold, taking away the dross, leaving only pure gold: rich, shining, valuable. The mercy of God is like this fire – God wants us to enjoy Heaven, to live with him forever. So that we might enjoy heaven, without shame or embarrassment or fear, God prepares us, he washes clean our baptismal garment, he renews our baptismal anointing, that we might live in his presence radiant, beautiful, worthy, joy-filled.

Today the Word of God sets before us two commandments which stand as one. The first is familiar to the many faithful Jews who live in our area and worship in their synagogues each Saturday. “Let these words be written on your hearts”, God says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart … soul … strength”. The last of the Fathers of the Church, St Bernard, explains that we are called to love God with all the tenderness of our heart, so that we are generous in serving him, open in our prayer, doing all that we can to grow in his friendship. We love God with our mind, that is, wisely, relying on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation – understanding, knowledge, counsel. Faith is a response of love for God: faith also speaks to our mind, faith seeks the truth, we seem to spend our life growing in knowledge and understanding God, his Gospel, the teaching of Christ and the Church. This is the challenge when life is difficult, problems arise, serious questions confront us. Strong love strives to persevere, “to love to the end” like Jesus in the days of Holy Week leading to the Cross. In dark moments, when God can seem absent or far away, God calls us to trust him more, to persevere in love, to place our hands in his. “Do not be afraid” he says.

The saints are examples of this sort of love. When we become familiar with the saints we soon realise that they weren’t saints from birth: it can take a life time to grow in holiness, to become a mirror image of Christ. Love for God and love for our neighbour go hand in hand. Saints who shine with love for God are always examples of love for neighbour: practical, gentle, genuine, convinced love. St Vincent de Paul was a priest who lived a fairly selfish life. But then he discovered the poor: today the Church’s outreach to the poor is placed under his protection, and even bears his name. St Therese of Lisieux grew out of a sulky childhood to become a giant in the Carmelite Order. “I don’t aim to do extraordinary things”, she once said, “but to do ordinary things in an extraordinary way”.

Does the name Asia Bibi ring a bell? She is a 53 year old mother of 5 in Pakistan. The other day she was acquitted of blasphemy against the prophet Mohammed. Her crime: bringing a jug of water to some Moslem women working in the hot sun, and taking a sip from the jug herself. “Unclean” they cried; “blasphemer”, demanding her conversion to Islam. For 9 years she has languished in a prison cell, awaiting the death sentence. In recent days the Supreme Court of Pakistan has granted her her freedom and she has been offered asylum in France and Spain. “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart … soul … mind … strength”.