

GAS Letter January 2008

Dear Fellow Members of the Guild:

I am writing this on All Saints Day, as we begin the month of the Holy Souls. This particular week, with its concentration on the whole of the Church, is of particular importance to all the members of the Guild. We venerate to-day the merits of all the Saints, those known to us and unknown, those formally canonised and not. This extraordinary cloud of witnesses is not only there to teach us by example, which they certainly do, but also to help us in our earthly pilgrimage by their powerful and meritorious intercession at the throne of grace. We often say that so much in business and society is accomplished by “who you know”, and there may be some truth in it. What is certainly true is that all of us have friends in high places, the Saints who can and do put in a good word for us. Tomorrow, All Souls Day, is the day on which we pray for all the departed. As the month goes on, our thoughts and prayers for the dead arrange themselves in particular ways: those dear to our own hearts, those lately dead, those whose anniversaries occur in this month, the dead of our parishes and of religious communities with which we may be associated, those for whom we are bound to pray, our benefactors, the departed clergy, and above all, the departed members of our Guild. Since 1873, we have been witnessing to the truth that the Church is not the human organisation that you see on earth! If that were true, God help us. In fact, the Church is the Universal Church throughout the world, it is true, but it is also the mystical Body of Christ, whose members are those alive now, all the baptised of the future, the Saints in Heaven who stand around the throne of Christ their King, and the Holy Souls in Purgatory who now wait, undergoing preparation to be ready for the fullest vision of God. This is the Catholic Church in all places and throughout all ages. The Feast of Christ the King, coming as it does either just before All Saints Day for those keeping the traditional calendar, or coming at the end of the month of November for those keeping the modern calendar, reminds us who our King is and of whose mystical Body we are members by virtue of Baptism.

The Mass is the Church’s perfect prayer taught to us by example by Our Lord, just as he earlier taught us the Our Father. In the Eucharist (the very word meaning “thanksgiving”), we give thanks to God for all his gifts. He gives us wheat and grapes, and of them by our own work and with the

talents he gives us we make bread and wine. We offer those gifts of bread and wine back to God in thanksgiving, and he makes of them something beyond all price: the gift of His Own Divine Son in His Body and Blood. The same process happens with our beloved dead, doesn't it? We offer them to Our Lord in death, as we must. The heart, in grief, reconciles itself to offering those it loves to God, trusting that He will honour this precious gift. What God does with the gift of our beloved dead is to make them Saints in His heavenly kingdom – more than we could have asked for or dreamt of. What we give to God, He offers back to us, and with His very touch it is made transcendent and wonderful. Bread and wine, the ordinary stuff of life, comes back to us as His Body and Blood. The Holy Souls, the ordinary people of God, who tried but often failed to follow Him, come back to us as Saints in Heaven, intercessors and friends in high places. Remember that every Saint in Heaven now was once someone's recently dead father, mother, sister, brother, son, daughter, teacher, priest, bishop, doctor, lawyer, shopkeeper, nurse, policeman and so on. They grieved when they lost their loved one, they prayed to God for that loved one, and of that loved one, so much missed and so much remembered, God made a Saint.

Our Annual Requiem for 2008 will be at the National Shrine at the Church of the Resurrection, New York, on Saturday, 8 November 2008. Particulars will be in the July Intercession Paper, but we hope many will be able to join us. At the Council Meeting in April, 2007, meeting at St Stephen's Church, Providence, Rhode Island, Father Andrew Sloane of St Paul's, K Street, Washington, Father Richard H. Lutz, Father Ralph Walker of St Michael and All Angels, Denver, Colorado, and I were re-elected to the Council to full three-year terms. The Officers of the Guild were re-elected unanimously to serve in 2008.

Always remember that The Guild is here to serve you and your dead. You may request, at any time, a Requiem Mass to be said for any baptised person, whether a member of The Guild or not, and a mass card will be sent to give news of this to anyone you wish to be notified. (An alms of \$5.00 to the Guild is requested for this.) Likewise, you may request prayers at the National Shrine for any departed person (no alms necessary), and we have prayer cards from the National Shrine which can be sent to someone to announce that prayers have been offered. As has been the case for many years, you may also enrol any baptised person known to you (please no celebrities or political figures!), in the perpetual

prayers of the Guild for an alms of \$20.00 to the Guild. The alms-giving is not to enrich the Guild but as a sign that your prayers involve a sacrifice not only of time and consideration but of your substance, as was done by Judas Maccabeus in the Book of Maccabees in Old Testament times, when he collected two thousand drachmas of silver to accompany their prayers for their fallen comrades.

Yours in the Holy Souls,

The Rev'd Canon Barry E. B. Swain, SSC
Superior-General