**23 Pentecost, All Saints, Nov. 1, 2015, Wisdom 3:1-9; Ps 24; Rev 21:1-6; John 11:32-44;**

**The Rev Mary S Trainor**

Roses are such beautiful flowers. The large, thick, deeply colored petals; the wonderful fragrance; the beauty of their shape. Roses have been around for a long time: 35 million years (according to fossil evidence). There are 150 species grown throughout the world for perfume, medicinal purposes, and gardens. When we arrange roses in a vase, we need to be careful, however; the stems have thorns, sharp thorns. In fact, one can get an infection called sporotrichosis from a simple prick from one of those thorns. The beauty of roses is counterbalanced by the presence of these thorns. During the middle ages, roses were thought to have significant religious meaning. Thorn-less roses signified a sinless life while roses with thorns represented flawed mortality. In the year 311 in Rome, a woman now known as St. Dorthea was condemned to death for her faith. On her way to her execution, a pagan lawyer named Theophilus mockingly told her to send him fruits from "the garden of heaven" when she died. It is said that when she was executed, an [angel](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=774) with a basket of thornless **roses** was sent to Theophilus, who was converted to [Christianity](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=2927) and later was martyred. Roses make us think of love, immortal love in a union that will never fade even through death. Roses are given on Valentine's day and are also given at funerals. Life and death, love and thorns, goodness and pain. A rose bush was said to have grown at the site of Christ’s death.  His blood associated with a red rose symbolizing love, and thorns symbolizing the **ultimate sacrifice**. Here is a poem about a rose bush that is often read at funerals (by A.L.Frink): "**A rose once grew where all could see, sheltered beside a garden wall, and as the days passed swiftly by, it spread its branches, straight and tall. One day, a beam of light shone through a crevice that had opened wide. The rose bent gently toward its warmth, then passed beyond to the other side. Now, you who deeply feel its loss, be comforted - the rose blooms there--its beauty even greater now, nurtured by God's own loving care."** What do roses remind you of today? In addition to Valentine's day, they remind me of the hospital deathbed of my husband's mother, Della Mae Trainor, we scattered rose petals on her as we kept vigil.

What was your reaction when I just said the words "died," "death," and "funeral" when I talked about roses? Did these words bring up sad memories or fears in you? Did they invoke anxiety in you about your own death? If yes, you are not alone. The fear of death is called "**thantophobia**," and it is one of the most common forms of anxiety. Yet, we as Christians know we are not to fear death: "***He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ***." (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Today is All Saints Day in the Church, a day when we talk about death. In Mexico, it is a public holiday:  [*Día de Muertos*](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%ADa_de_Muertos)*--* there are festivals and parades. These are not about Halloween pumpkins and candy, but rather are celebrations of the lives of those who have died. On this feast day, we join people from all over the world to pray for those who have gone before us: those who have encouraged us or set an example for us, those who we knew well, and those who we knew a little but respected a lot. We pray for them out of gratitude, and we know (at some mysterious level) that they are praying for us too as we journey through life. We see the faithful dead as members of the Church, alive in Christ, and so we pray for them and ask their prayers for us.

I wonder: Was there a spray of red roses, in the midst of the tearful scene at Lazarus' tomb in our Gospel today? Martha and Mary (Lazarus' sisters) were gripped with grief at the death of their brother. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were like family to Jesus; their home was as close as adult Jesus came to a real home. The scene must have been so sad; overwhelming loss and sadness filling everyone present. We are told that even, "***Jesus wept***." Jesus wept for his good friend, and He wept for us. The crucifixion was to happen soon. In the midst of this grief came life, came resurrection. Jesus said to Martha in verse 25 (earlier in this chapter of John), ***"I am resurrection and I am life,"*** and He lived this out. Yes, we see in this story and in the resurrection Jesus' victory over death. This is why we are not to have thantophobia -- we are to live free from fear of death; that is God's plan for us.

So, today is a day in which our macabre thoughts about death are replaced with peace, victory, and the sense of being supported by the risen Christ and a whole lot of people cheering us on. This is a day when we celebrate eternal life with God in heaven. Today's Revelation reading tells us about heaven. John said, "***I saw a new heaven and a new earth....the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God....he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more....See, I am making all things new***." We are going to be dancing in heaven, with new bodies, no tears, no pain; all love.

So, today -- even though we talk a lot about death and the dead today --it is a day when we celebrate Christ's victory over death and the amazing lives of those who have gone before us. While we have information about many people who are recognized formally by the Church as Saints, there are many unknown or unsung Saints, who may have been forgotten. Today, we remember them -- they are not forgotten; our lives have been enriched by them. Once a little boy attended a church that had beautiful stained-glass windows. He was told that the windows contained pictures of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, St. John, St. Paul, and other saints. Later, the little boy told someone, "**A saint is a person whom the light shines through."** Indeed, as we live our lives following in Christ's footsteps His Light shines through us all to others. The saints are not just "stained glass perfect people;" they were and are ordinary people who reflect God's Light.

In a few minutes, I will be praying and honoring by name those on our All Saints prayer list. Saints encourage us on our spiritual journey. Sense them cheering you along your spiritual journey as you reflect Christ's light and live into The Victory of the resurrection. Amen.