

## 20181104 Sunday Celebration of All Souls Praying for the Dead?

Anglicans have an awkward history about whether we should pray for the dead or not. However, from the earliest times of the Church's history this was a normal part of its prayer life. However, there is no doubt that by the time of Pope Julius II (died 1513 and the one who commissioned Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel) things had taken a turn for the worse. To raise money to build the new St Peter's Basilica in Rome he started the selling indulgences, guaranteeing the release the souls of dead in purgatory. There was a reaction to this corruption led by Martin Luther, and the Reformation was launched. Reactions tend to go to the opposite extreme and the prayers for the dead were banned as a vain invention. The next step was John Calvin (1509-1564), the founder of what we call Presbyterianism. He rewrote the understanding of predestination, that is God predestines the salvation or damnation of each person, regardless of what they do in life. It is a pernicious and un-Christian teaching, especially as it had no correspondence to the life of our Lord and his compassion to those who were considered 'the damned' by the Pharisees. Why would our Lord die on the Cross for the world if God has already decided who will go to heaven and who will go to hell? Unfortunately, the Anglican Church adopted this teaching in the reign of Edward VI, son of Henry VIII, and was reinforced by Oliver Cromwell. Funerals became dreadful as there was no point in praying for the departed if their eternal travel arrangements were already pre-booked! This state-of-affairs continued until the Crimean War (1853-1856) and the American Civil War (1861-1865). This marked the beginning of modern warfare and the mechanised slaughter of thousands. For the first time there was enormous national grief, and was tragically surpassed by WW I. John Calvin's grim teaching was of no use in the care of the thousands bereaved. In our Church, things began to change – the shambolic and disgraceful funeral services were replaced by dignified use of what already existed in the Book of Common Prayer book. In 1873 the Guild of All Souls was established and who gave teaching to the clergy how to conduct a funeral service. The Guild also encouraged the use of proper the furnishings necessary for a Christian funeral. Funerals were now conducted in a church, followed by a burial in the church graveyard, instead of a brief and mean graveside service. They also began teaching about praying for the departed, which has become a normal part of Anglican Sunday services as the anniversaries of the dead are remembered, Requiem Mass is celebrated, and the prayers of All Souls day restored.

One side effect of those wars was the restoration of having a Crucifix, on or near the altar. As the bereaved remembered their fallen soldiers who died for the nation, they could look upon the one who offered his life in sacrifice for the salvation of all. In our parish church we have a beautiful Crucifix above the Altar, but also a striking Altar Cross of the Triumph of the Resurrection. The two go together as the Sacrifice and Victory for our sakes.