



**HOMILY OF CARDINAL BASIL HUME  
AT THE DEATH OF DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES  
WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL, LONDON  
5<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 1997**

“Death, where is your victory?”

St. Paul was in defiant mood when he wrote those words in his letter to the Christians at Corinth.

No, death, you cannot defeat us. One day you will visit each one of us, we know. Not one of us can escape from you. We recoil from you, for we see in you an enemy, the ruthless destroyer of life, the foe who shows no mercy. But no, death, victory will not be yours, for we believe that Christ rose from the dead in order to open up for us a gateway to another place where union with God locks us forever into that endless “now” of ecstatic love. We were made for that. No, death is not the end but a new beginning.

Diana, you are now on your way to the vision of God, to a happiness that the world could not give you, where true peace is to be found. Tell us: did you, early on Sunday morning, suddenly find yourself in the presence of God, realising then, as we all must, that none of us is worthy to be in that presence, face to face, until ready to be so?

Our Catholic faith tells us that our prayers can help the dead to be prepared for that union with God. We shall pray that the last part of the journey for you, Diana, will be swift and easy.

I know you will not mind my saying that you were like the rest of us, frail, imperfect, flawed, but we loved you still. It is thus also with God Himself. He loves us very much. He now embraces you in death. He will most surely surely judge you mercifully. The maimed, the sick, the young, the old, were of much concern to you. You will have discovered that in serving these you were in fact serving Him, even if you had not realised it at the time. We have the Lord’s authority for that.

“When did we see you hungry  
And give you food, or thirsty and give you to drink,  
Homeless, injured, sick or marginalised?  
As often as you did this to the least of these  
My brothers and sisters  
You did it to me.”

There will be many greeting you now with gratitude and joy, those who have gone before you and whom you helped so generously. For us it is different. We remain behind to weep and to mourn. It is right that we should do so. A sense of loss and bereavement have been strong, the initial shock is still with us. We had to do something, lay flowers at different place, queue for several hours to sign our names, the scale of this quite surprising and impressive. We expressed something deep within us through such actions. They were an unconscious prayer to God, almost, as well as a beautiful tribute to you.

But for those of us who remain there is more. We are being called by this sad death to reflect on many things. The sudden awfulness of her death has been a brutal awakening to our own mortality, to a fragility of all our human joys and sorrows. We are being called to acknowledge that it is not here in this world that our ultimate happiness is to be found. Maybe the events of last week have already awakened within us, or may yet do so, that religious instinct which leads us to seek the truth which leads us to seek the true meaning of our lives. Maybe God is knocking at our door at this time, seeking to be admitted into our minds and hearts.

As a nation, we must discover what it is to be charitable. We must all become more sensitive to the needs of each other, more tolerant of each other's faults,

less cynical about motives, less anxious to cut others down to size, more understanding of their actions. We should also reflect on the way we treat those prominent in public life, how much privacy we give them, what respect we accord them. There is much for us to consider. When these days of sorrow and mourning are over, life will become normal again, and so it should. But the lessons must not be forgotten.

Farewell, then, Diana.

The agonies of the heart and

The anguish of the mind

Were often your companions in life.

They were your teachers, too,

For from them you learned understanding,

Compassion and kindness.

These are your finest legacy to us.

Thank you for all the good you did.

Thank you for the joy you gave to many.

Thank you for being like the rest of us".

---