

Dear brothers and sisters, I am sure the Lord recognises everyone in this Church today. Because in different ways, you have come to know him and to love him. Our relationship with God is rather like our friendships; it is not just a given, but a process of getting to know a person. At first you know them a little. You remember their face. You learn their name. In time, as you meet often, you start to recognise your new friend more fully. Their voice, their laugh, and even the way they walk into a room. Recognition grows into relationship, and relationship deepens into love. It is OK to say we love our friends, the ones we know, and who know us best.

The word *recognise* comes from Latin: *re* means *again*, and *cognoscere*, *to know*. Put simply, to recognise someone is to say: *I know you again, I know you some more*. What makes us recognisable? Two things: our face and our name. Your face, which no one else in the world has, and your name that is a part of your social DNA.

I saw recognition at work a few days ago, looking at an old photograph on a boarding house wall. Though the picture was from years ago, the housemistress recognised every face and remembered every name. Recognition brings people alive again, because faces and names are what hold memory and relationship together.

And in today's Gospel, Jesus tells us a story about two people, one poor and one rich, but Jesus only seems to recognise one of them. The poor man has a name: **Lazarus**. Jesus knows his name and his face, covered in sores. Although he suffered greatly, he is not forgotten. When he dies, he is carried by the angels to Abraham's side.

But for the rich man, no name is given, nor is his face remembered. He is known only for what he owned. As St Augustine puts it: *You are what you love*. Lazarus is loved by God, and his name lives on. The rich man loved only his wealth; when it perishes, his identity dies with it. As St Gregory the Great once commented about the namelessness of the rich man: *The poor man is named, the rich man is not, for God recognises the humble but not the proud*.

To be Christian is to recognise in every person the face of Christ. As Isaiah says, *I have called you by name, you are mine*. Every person we meet is known by God, and deserves to be known by us. But sometimes we walk past the very face of Christ, like the rich man of the gospel. The readings help us to think about our failings towards the poor; sometimes we need to play the game of full disclosure with *Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden*. It takes courage to admit how often we fail to see the

face of Christ in the poor. We walk past Lazarus at the gate: the unnoticed member of our year group or house, the new neighbour, the stranger in the pew. We fester over our own worries and forget the people God upholds.

Possessions and wealth. Fine clothing. They promise much. But what use if they leave us nameless and faceless — like the rich man?

As the autumn begins to set in there are signs of the shortness of our days with limited time to make amends; because *death is just around the corner*. Don't be frightened. We know the Risen Christ. As St Benedict wrote, *Keep death daily before your eyes*. Remembering the shortness of our days helps us cherish every day, recognising Christ in the people before us while there is still time.

So we *move toward the darkness with a smile*, not running away from suffering, loneliness, or the people at the edge, but daring to draw near. And when we do, we find that the simplest act of a greeting or a name remembered can be the start of a recognition that grows into love.

At baptism, your name was spoken aloud, and your face was signed with the cross. Jesus will never forget your face. He will never stop calling your name. And when your journey is done, he will look at you with love, he will recognise you, he will call you by name, and he will welcome you home. When Christ sees you, he will not see a stranger, but a friend. A face he knows. A name he loves.

Perhaps it is worth hearing the message of St Paul to Timothy in the second reading again; think of the face of the suffering Jesus as you listen, whose name is above all names: *pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.*

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open, all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden.
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy Name;
through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**