Whenever we gather around the altar in obedience to Our Lord’s instruction to share bread and wine it seems to me that the veil that separates earth and heaven is very thin. Whenever we join the song of the angels in heaven “Holy, holy, holy…” I’m certain that if we cannot hear the angel voices, it is only because we aren’t listening hard enough....but today, as we gather to remember our own beloved dead that great community is closer than ever.

Odilo, abbot of Cluny, gave us this feast of All Souls as a commemoration of “all the dead who have existed from the beginning of the world to the end of time.”

So we pray for them, looking backwards, but also for ourselves and our children, and our children’s children. From the perspective of eternity, that barrier which we call death is non-existent. Where there is no time, no past, present or future, then there can be no endings or beginnings...as we sang this morning in the great hymn for All Saints “All are one in thee, for all are thine”

So today we pause to remember and to pray for those whom we love but see no longer, knowing that the ties that connected us in life, that made us pray for them and they for us, remain un-broken. As they stand in God’s closer presence, I know they are still praying for us...as we do for them.

We pray not to rescue them from the bonds of hell – our God offers unconditional love, welcome and forgiveness and we can be certain that “The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God and there shall no torment touch them”.

Rather we pray with thanksgiving for lives that have enriched our own and with confidence in the living hope that we are offered through God’s Son who destroyed death forever, and showed us that nothing in all creation that can separate us from God’s love.

It is this realisation that enables us to rejoice, even in the sadness of separation. The great Orthodox Kontakion for the departed puts it well

“all we go down to the dust
Yet weeping o’er the grave we make our song
“Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia”

Though we may mourn their absence for a while, we do so knowing that friends on earth and friends above are all one in Christ Jesus.

So let us pray with John Donne

*Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening
into the house and gate of heaven,
to enter into that gate and dwell in that house,
where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light;
no noise nor silence, but one equal music;
no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession;
no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity;
in the habitations of thy glory and dominion,
world without end.*