

## Views from the Pews – All Souls and All Saints

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852 - 1924) composed one of the most beloved of modern church choral pieces, based on the first few lines of this morning's First Testament reading. *Justorum animae* is one of Stanford's *Three motets*. I can never hear its profound faith, gentle dignity and mellifluous harmony without thinking of King's College Chapel. Stanford had condensed verses 1-3 of the original to

The souls of the righteous are in God's hand, and neither death nor evil shall torment them there. In the eyes of the unwise they have died, but they are at peace.

On that day in 2008 when my revered godmother Katherine Watson, a week short of her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, was in hospital in Oxford, I was in that incomparable Chapel, listening to the choir with my cell phone turned off. At the end of the service, I walked out into the sunshine and turned it back on. The very first message that came up was from Katherine's family, to tell me that she had died half an hour ago. It was as if the brightness of the sun faded, while all the rest of the world carried on as if nothing had happened.

English poet Thomas Campion (1567 –1620) expressed better than anyone how a weary soul steeped in confidence in God's mercy could long for death:

Never weather-beaten sail more willing bent to shore  
Never tired pilgrim's limbs affected slumber more  
Than my wearied sprite now longs to fly out of my troubled breast:  
O come quickly, sweetest Lord, and take my soul to rest.  
Ever blooming are the joys of Heaven's high Paradise  
Cold age deafs not there our ears nor vapour dims our eyes:  
Glory there the sun outshines whose beams the blessed only see:  
O come quickly, glorious Lord, and raise my sprite to thee!

One of Stanford's contemporaries, Hubert Parry (1848-1918), set these words to a motet of lyric beauty that had the same effect on me in 2017. God answered this prayer for Katherine, and for my beloved hubby Joe. Both certainly felt the weight of the words after decades of silent suffering. We played the Trinity College choir's recording at Joe's funeral.

On both occasions and ever since, those comforting words, and the aural balm of gorgeous music, wrapped their arms around my sorrow. Grief for our beloved departed is natural, but we can trust God that 'they are at peace' .

- Kim King