Yesterday, the Church celebrated the Feast of All Saints. Today we celebrate the Feast of All Souls. Yesterday, we prayed in thanksgiving for the Church’s approximately 13,000 canonized saints. Today, we pray for the countless souls who were never canonized, but who we trust are with Our Lord in heaven. I trust that many of our parents, grandparents, siblings, children, friends are there. ... What deceased persons do you pray for especially? ... Whose names might you have written in the Book of the Dead, which two books are positioned near the sanctuary? ... Personally, I wrote the names of my mom and dad, my brother Bart and my Uncle Bart, who died at 90 as a Vincentian priest and who inspired me, and continues to inspire me, in my life as a Vincentian priest. I also pray for my deceased aunts and uncles. We believe in life after death.

Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die.” (Jn. 11.25) Jesus performed countless miracles, three dozen of which are recorded. On three occasions he brought people back to life: the synagogue leader’s daughter (Mt. 9.18-26), the widow’s son (Lk. 7.11-17) and his good friend Lazarus (Jn. 11.1-44). And of course, Jesus rose from the dead, and he was seen on more than dozen occasions by Mary Magdalene and other women, his apostles, and 500 disciples.

Life after death, or eternal life after earthly life, what is it like? What will we do? Jesus explains, in response to the Pharisees who were trying to trap him, “In heaven, .... When people rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but they live like angels in heaven.” (Mt. 22.30) We will spend eternal life praising God, communicating with our companions in heaven, and praying for those people still in Purgatory and here on earth.

St. Paul writes about death, “Death, where is your sting?” Well, actually death’s sting is very piercing. As a young priest, I went to many funerals and sincerely prayed for and preached about the deceased person. But after four years of ordination, my father died. No funeral has been the same for me. Because I have experienced the death of a loved one, I feel a simpatico with the surviving family members. We kid that the two certainties in life are death and taxes. This is true. But the death of a loved one is very personal, and stings deeply; death breaks an earthly bond with a person: you can no longer see them, hear them, touch them. There is a new spiritual bond that continues and grows, but the physical separation really stings.

The belief in Jesus’ resurrection and our resurrection after earthly life and death is central to our Christian faith. We pray for the dead at every Mass in the Eucharistic Prayer, “Remember also our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection, and all who have died in your mercy. Welcome them into the light of your face.” Every daily Mass is offered for someone living...
or deceased, and most oftentimes, for someone deceased. At every Sunday Mass, we conclude our Nicene Creed, “and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.” At many Masses, in the Prayer of the Faithful, we pray for those who have died. At every Funeral Mass, we proclaim in the preface, “Life is changed, not ended.” In today’s Mass, the readings proclaim, “the souls of the just are in the hand of God;” “the Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want;” and “this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day.”

We remember the dead and we pray for them. We keep photos of them, or prayer cards, or some memorabilia. I’ve worn my father’s Miraculous Medal for the past 37 years, and I keep hanging in my room at Vincentian Residence my Uncle Bart’s vow cross. And we invite you to process forward after this homily to write in the Book of the Dead, the names of those for whom you pray, and I promise you that we in campus ministry and all the priests will pray too throughout this month of November. And we do these things because Jesus has promised us, “I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die.”