

Ps 90 (Simeon's) FARE: ANGELUS
R 48

Heb. 11^{1,17-19} (Advent)

That short piece, from the Letter to the Hebrews, is the N.T. reading you'd hear at Mass on Sunday. It'll be preceded by the account, from the Book of Genesis, of the event to which it refers — the test of Abraham's faith, when the life of his son and the fulfilment of the promises made by God in whom he'd put his complete trust, seemed to be snatched away — by God Himself. Following this Hebrews extract, there's the simple, profound proclamation — 'I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me will never die'; and then the Gospel, Jesus raising Lazarus from death, as recounted by St. John. There's a very obvious link between these three passages, a theme of death and life and faith. And they're chosen for this, to illustrate and instruct on the meaning of the Baptism through which share in the passion, death-resurrection of Christ we'll be specially celebrating in two weeks' time. When Jesus raised Lazarus from death, it was a sign of the power of God at work among men, and of the imminent death and return to life (of Jesus himself). Only, this is a new life now, not mortal; and it's this that a Christian begins to share with Christ, by faith and the holy sign of faith, the sacrament of Baptism. From the beginning, life, new life, has been a dominant image in the church's understanding and presentation of Baptism, closely linked with the celebration of Christ's passover from this world to His Father and His sending of the Holy Spirit upon His disciples. So, before Easter,

we're invited to think and pray about this new life we've been given and which all mankind is offered freely: a life which goes beyond death, which is a liberation from sin and futility, which is bound up with the life and love of God himself. To "be born again, of water and the Holy Spirit" — like the educated man to whom Jesus said this was necessary for entry into the kingdom of God, we're often puzzled too about what He meant, how to explain His constant reference to another life beyond our direct, normal experience. We must think about it, in reflection and prayer before Easter — why not now, as we recite our midday prayer and listen to a Passiontide motet: *Salvator mundi* — 'O Saviour of the world, save us'

Victorine
Pardak
R 244

PRAYERS — MUSIC

Life is one of those fundamental ideas everybody knows about and takes for granted, without being able to explain it in any simple terms — we don't need to anyway, in ordinary circumstances: we know what's meant by 'social life, economic life, night life, a dog's life ...'. People are concerned about life — how to preserve it, for themselves and (most of the time anyway) for others; how to prolong it (despite what we sometimes feel and say about its worth) — talk of a perpetual youth pill, or treatment, always gets publicity. We want to improve life, have a better life, live a good, worthwhile life. And all very understandably, for this is the only life we've experience of, the only one we've got — or is it? All life is activity of some kind — think of all the phrases in wh. you use the word. Activity: not necessarily frenzied physical exertion, but any kind of use and action of any faculty or power.

You can, legitimately, speak of a 'love-life' - and for us it's the most personal of all our activities, in which we are most ourselves. Despite a rather common but inaccurate and far too simplified understanding of the Bible, it is in terms of personal contact that God has always made Himself known, and most often in terms of love; because here is the nearest experience we have to understanding God - He who is, who is alive. When Jesus said, at His last Supper in His prayer to His Father: "This is eternal life, to know thee the one true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent", he wasn't talking about education, intellectual knowledge, but about knowing a Person (which is not the same thing as knowing about a Person). The life that never ends, which Christ won for us and gives us through faith, is God's love: He makes us share, to put it forcefully, the love-life of God himself. Love is unitive, tending towards uniting people - and with God it's the same: we couldn't really love God at all unless we were able to share His love which is not limited, subject to fading or to the separation which death brings in every love we've experience of. The activity of this new kind of life a love is not still, it is natural to us, within the scope of human power unaided. That's why it's called a 'grace', a free gift given to us, why it's called 'super-natural'. Certainly, it remains mysterious to us (there's always mystery in any personal relationship); but it is real, something we've been given and should try to understand, and above all, thank God for.