

Do you remember last month's letter ended with a cryptic clue? Probably not; only one person, as far as I know, got it right: the answer was "esoteric." Esoteric describes something intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with a specialised knowledge or interest. Hence my final comment, "not what the Bible translators wanted."

Hidden truths are sometimes thought of as esoteric, although they are usually just fogged by the passage of time. In other words, we forget them and have to rediscover where and how the human condition, almost helplessly, leads us to make the same old mistakes.

As well as Remembrance Sunday, November also has a fixed day of remembrance, All Souls' Day (on the 2nd). This day, as the eponymous title indicates, is especially to remember everyone no longer with us in this life. It's when we tend to remember all who nurtured and loved us. The service we have (18.30 at All Saints', Sutton) is a strangely humbling gathering of us who ask God to give us confidence that their final journey fulfilled this life in the receipt of His promises. During this brief service, we are able to take part in that great symbol of remembrance and prayer: lighting a candle and placing it in the sanctuary in the hope that a new light has dawned for the person remembered. Yes, it is a mystery and remains so until we are the ones, hopefully, being remembered in the great ongoing flow of life. And so we remember, especially at the going down of the sun, which is a great metaphor for the coming unknown, death and hope for the dawning of a new day. There are few things to be said at such times which could have any real meaning at all in the light of this mystery confronting us; one of them (by no coincidence, often used at the evening service of vespers), is Psalm 117:

*Praise the Lord, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples!*

*For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!*

On the one hand, it doesn't seem much; on the other, it's everything. At the going down of the sun (and in the morning) we really ought to remember: remember that we will share, with they who have gone before us, the bitter-sweet kiss of departure. If ever there was a quasi-esoteric truth, then that is it. And although the human condition of this age seems to kid many that death will not come, it will.

What then to do? Only three things in the face of such truth: respect life with humility, learn to love, trust in God. Then this life, as well as the next, will be fulfilled.

"I am the way, the truth and the life." Guess who said that.