All Souls Homily — Our Lady Queen of Peace Cemetery

Nov 2, 2026 – Bishop Manuel de Jesús Rodríguez

I. Among the graves, in the hand of God

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Yesterday the Church lifted our eyes to heaven and rejoiced with all the saints. Today she bends down, as a mother does, and kneels beside the graves of her children. On this Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, we come to this holy ground of Our Lady Queen of Peace not as visitors to a place of endings, but as believers standing in a field of seeds. Every stone around us marks a name that God has not forgotten. Every grave here is a promise waiting to be kept.

We bring with us our own beloved dead: parents and grandparents, husbands and wives, sons and daughters, friends whose voices we still hear in memory. We bring the forgotten souls, those who have no one left to pray for them. And today we bring nine more.

Yesterday afternoon, just before one o'clock, a small jet carrying nine people fell from the sky over Palm Beach County, near Military Trail in Greenacres, only a few miles from where we stand. In a moment, all nine lives on board were ended. As of last night their names had not been made public. ***[If the names have been released, read them here.]*** We may not yet know their names, but God knows each one. He knew them before they were formed in the womb, and He knows them now.

This Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered for the eternal repose of all nine souls who died in that crash. We pray, too, for their families, who woke yesterday with plans and went to bed with grief. We pray for the first responders who ran toward the fire, for the hundreds of neighbors

forced from their homes, and for all who saw what no one should have to see.

The nearness of this tragedy, on the very eve of All Souls, is not lost on any of us. It teaches us, more powerfully than any sermon, the lesson this day is meant to teach: *we do not know the day nor the hour.*

II. What the Word of God tells us today

The Book of Wisdom opens with words that the Church has placed on the lips of mourners for centuries: *the souls of the just are in the hand of God.* To the foolish, the author says, their passing seemed an affliction, their going forth from us utter destruction. But they are at peace. Like gold tried in the furnace, God has proved them and found them worthy.

Notice what Wisdom does not say. It does not say that death is unreal, or that our tears are mistaken. It says that death is not the final word. What looks like ruin to the eye is, to the eye of faith, a passage. Even a death as sudden and violent as yesterday's does not take a soul out of the hand of God. No fire, no wreckage, no crater in the earth reaches that far.

And so we sang with the Psalmist: *The Lord is my shepherd.* Even in the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil, for He is with us. The shepherd does not stand at the edge of the valley calling us across. He walks it beside us, rod and staff in hand.

Saint Paul tells the Romans *why* we may dare to hope: because God proved His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Our hope does not rest on our own merits. It rests on a love that went before us, a love that was poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. If God loved us that much when we were far from Him, how much more will He save us now that we are reconciled?

Finally, in the Gospel, Jesus speaks the words that every grieving heart longs to hear. All that the Father gives Him, He says, will come to Him,

and whoever comes to Him He will never cast out. And then the promise on which this whole day rests: it is the Father's will that of all He has given, *nothing be lost*, and that it be raised up on the last day.

The will of the Father is that nothing be lost. That is the foundation of our prayer this morning. We pray for the dead because we believe Christ means what He says. And we pray for them because the Church has always known what the Book of Maccabees calls *a holy and wholesome thought*: that our prayers and our offering of this Sacrifice can help those who have died in God's friendship but still need to be purified before they see Him face to face.

III. Thomas à Kempis: how quickly the glory of the world passes

If we pray for the dead today, we must also let the dead preach to us. And few have listened to that sermon more carefully than Thomas à Kempis, the humble canon of the fifteenth century whose *Imitation of Christ* has been, after the Bible itself, one of the most beloved books in Christian history.

In the twenty-third chapter of the first book, *On the Meditation of Death*, Thomas writes with a bluntness we sometimes avoid: *Very quickly will there be an end of thee here; take heed therefore how it will be with thee in another world. Today man is, and tomorrow he will be seen no more.* Those nine travelers boarded a plane yesterday morning in Texas, bound for the islands. Today they are seen no more. Thomas is not trying to frighten us. He is trying to wake us.

He continues: *Blessed is he that always hath the hour of his death before his eyes, and daily prepareth himself to die.* And in the opening chapter he warns that *it is vanity to wish for a long life, and to take little care of a good life.*

Think of how much of our energy is spent here, in this beautiful corner of the world, on things that pass: our homes and accounts, our reputations, our comfort, our worries about tomorrow. None of these is evil. But none of them can follow us through those gates. *O how quickly passeth away the glory of the world,* Thomas sighs. Sic transit gloria mundi.

So his counsel is simple: *Keep thyself as a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth, to whom the affairs of this world do not belong. Keep thy heart free, and lifted up to God, because here thou hast no abiding city.* The question this cemetery puts to each of us is not whether we will die. It is whether, when that hour comes, our hearts will already be turned toward home.

IV. St. Ignatius of Loyola: choosing today as we will wish we had chosen

Saint Ignatius of Loyola knew something about lives interrupted without warning. In 1521, a young soldier dreaming of glory, he was struck down by a cannonball at Pamplona. In one moment, every plan he had was over. Yet in the long months of recovery that followed, God turned his heart around, and the wounded courtier became a saint.

Ignatius built his *Spiritual Exercises* on what he called the *Principle and Foundation*: that we are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save our souls. Everything else on the face of the earth is given to help us reach that end. And so, he says, we should hold ourselves free, *indifferent* is his word, so that we do not desire health more than sickness, riches more than poverty, honor more than dishonor, a long life more than a short one. We desire only what leads us to the end for which we were made.

That is a hard teaching on a day like this. But it is also a consoling one. The length of a life is not its measure. A short life given to God is not a lesser life. What matters is where it is pointed.

Ignatius also offers a practical rule that I commend to every one of you. When we face an important decision, he says, we should imagine ourselves at the point of death, and ask what choice we would then wish we had made. Then make that choice now. And he adds a second image: to picture ourselves standing before our Lord on the day of judgment, and to choose today what we will be glad to have chosen then.

What would change in your life this week if you made your decisions that way? Which grudge would you finally let go? Which phone call would you finally make? Which confession would you no longer postpone?

When Ignatius himself came to die in Rome in July 1556, there was no drama. He died quietly, almost unnoticed, because he had spent his whole life getting ready. He had long before made his own the prayer we know as the *Suscipe*: *Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. Give me only your love and your grace; that is enough for me.* A soul that has already given everything away has nothing left for death to take.

V. St. Joseph, patron of a happy death

And who will help us get ready? The Church points us to a quiet man who never speaks a single word in the Gospels: Saint Joseph.

Scripture tells us nothing of Joseph's death. But the Christian tradition has always pictured it with tenderness: that Joseph died before Jesus began His public ministry, with Jesus on one side of him and Mary on the other. Who could ask for a better death than that? To breathe one's last in the arms of the Son of God and His Mother. That is why, for centuries, the faithful have called upon Joseph as the *patron of a happy death*.

A happy death does not mean a painless one, or a long and peaceful one. It means a death in the friendship of God. Joseph teaches us that such a death is prepared by a faithful life: by the daily work of an honest

carpenter, by obedience in the night when the angel spoke, by protecting those entrusted to him.

Not everyone is granted time at the end. The nine who died yesterday had no hours of farewell, no bedside, no chance to call for a priest. That is precisely why we entrust them today to the mercy of God and to the intercession of Saint Joseph. The Church does not presume to judge any soul. She does something better: she prays. God is not bound by the clock of our final moments. Between the beginning of a fall and the end of it, His grace can reach a heart in ways we will never know until eternity.

So let us ask Joseph, guardian of the Holy Family, to guard the families of these nine, and our own. And let us learn the old prayer that so many of our grandparents said every night:

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you.

VI. Mary, Queen of Peace and Gate of Heaven

And where Joseph is, Mary is never far. It is no accident that we pray today in a place that bears her name: Our Lady Queen of Peace. The Church gave Mary that title in the Litany of Loreto in 1917, in the middle of the First World War, when Pope Benedict XV begged her to obtain for a bleeding world the peace it could not give itself. The peace Mary brings is not the absence of sorrow. It is the peace of a heart that trusts God even at the foot of the Cross.

No one understands grief like this Mother. She stood on Calvary and watched her Son die. She held His lifeless body in her arms. She knows what the families of yesterday's nine are feeling tonight, and she knows what each of you carries to the graves you have come to visit. And

because she also saw the empty tomb on Easter morning, she can teach us to grieve as people who hope.

The same Litany calls her *Janua Caeli*, Gate of Heaven. Through her, the Son of God came down to us; through her intercession, she leads us up to Him. A gate is not the destination; it is the way through. Mary never keeps us for herself. She stands at the threshold and, as at Cana, points us to her Son: *Do whatever He tells you.*

How many times in our lives have we asked her, in every Hail Mary, to pray for us *now and at the hour of our death*? That is the prayer of a lifetime, and it is never wasted. Today we ask her, Queen of Peace and Gate of Heaven, to open the way for the nine who were taken so suddenly, for the souls who rest in this cemetery under her mantle, and one day for each of us.

VII. Our invitation this morning

My friends, before we return to the altar, I leave you with three invitations.

First, pray for the dead. Do not let this week pass without it. The Church grants a special indulgence for the souls in purgatory to those who visit a cemetery and pray for the departed during these first eight days of November. You are here. Before you leave, stop at a grave, perhaps one with no flowers, and pray for that soul. Pray every day for the nine who died yesterday, and for your own beloved dead. Our love for them did not end at the grave; now it takes the form of prayer.

Second, take up Thomas à Kempis. Read a chapter of the *Imitation of Christ* this week, especially the chapter on death. Ask yourself honestly where your heart is anchored: in what passes, or in what lasts.

Third, live as Ignatius taught and die as Joseph died. Make today's choices as you will wish you had made them at the hour of death. Go to confession. Reconcile with the person you have been avoiding. Tell the

people you love that you love them. And each night, place your soul in the hands of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

In a few moments, on this altar, Christ will make present once again the Sacrifice by which He conquered death. Here heaven and earth meet. Here the Church on earth, the souls being purified, and the saints in glory are joined in one communion. Here we hold out our hands for the Bread of Life, of which Jesus said that whoever eats it will live forever.

The souls of the just are in the hand of God. May the souls of these nine, and of all the faithful departed whose bodies rest in this holy ground, be held in that hand forever.

Mary, Queen of Peace, Gate of Heaven, pray for them, and pray for us.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. May their souls, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Amen.