



The Requiem Mass of Ann Widdecombe

HOMILY

Given by the Right Reverend David Charlesworth OSB
Abbot of Buckfast

In our pain and in our sufferings, Jesus brings hope to our imperfect human condition. God is not a God who ordinarily rescues us, but rather is a God who redeems us. God doesn't usually intervene to save us from pain, and death; rather he offers Divine Grace, which leads us to a share in life everlasting. In his lowest hour, when Jesus was humiliated, suffered, and died on the cross, Jesus is jeered by the crowd with the challenge: "If God is your father, let him rescue you!" (Matthew 27:43). But there's no rescue. Instead, Jesus dies in pain. God raises him up only after his death. Our Christian hope is the hope of resurrection. Without a faith in the resurrection of Jesus, we would, in Saint Paul's words, be 'foolish' to call ourselves Christian. People can and do argue over this or that aspect of the resurrection, but for a Christian it reveals the destruction of our physical limitations and the way to the completeness of our humanity. In Christ we are made fully human. In Christ we are made perfect in justice and truth, in peace and joy. This perfection is called divinity.

At Easter, in our annual celebration of the Lord's Resurrection, Ann was always present here at the Vigil Mass, hearing the retelling of our salvation history and renewing our commitment to the Risen Christ, by repeating together our Baptismal Promises. During the year, Ann faithfully attended the Solemn Mass on Sundays and Holydays. Sir Christian Sweeting is reported to have said that her faith was "not merely something she professed, still less something she confined to Sundays, but the foundation on which she ordered her life. She rendered an exceptional service to the church by demonstrating that faith need not be hidden or apologised for in public life. At a time when many regarded religious conviction as something best kept private, she spoke plainly and fearlessly as a Catholic."

Our lives as Christians in this world must strive for justice and truth, without these in the context of honest debate, there can be no peace or joy. In this way, we may connect with others in our shared journey through this life. For Ann, says Peter Stanford in the

Tablet, “friendship did not follow party lines, ... Indeed she liked you better once you had survived a vigorous debate with her ... In her long career in the public eye, Ann was more lampooned, insulted and sniggered at than almost any other politician, certainly any male politician. She was called many cruel names, ... but she not only turned the other cheek, she laughed at every new jibe.” In this regard, Ann took Christ as her model.

In the gospel of Saint Matthew (10:32), Jesus says: “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.” There is no doubt that Ann fearlessly upheld the moral and social teachings of the Catholic Church. Her voice regarding these issues certainly upset some. We have not been told the reasons for her murder, but in past centuries, and elsewhere in the world today men and women pay with their lives for holding fast to the Christian faith. As Tertullian, a Christian writer of the 2nd century, declared, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

In the midst of the shock, clamour and sometimes unwarranted comment surrounding her death, our response is to pray for the repose of her soul, to give thanks for her fortitude, and offer Holy Mass in this Abbey Church which Ann called her safe haven. Here we pray that she has finally been enfolded in the arms of the Risen Lord, where true love and peace reign, and where she will hear the Lord’s words, “well done, my good and faithful servant.”

Buckfast Abbey
12 August 2026