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## *Sermon for the Homeless Requiem*

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*"Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Psalm 24:7*

**The Rt. Rev. Robert C. Wright**  
**Bishop, the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta**

Good evening! It is good to be here with you. And, I am grateful to each of you for being here this evening. I am especially grateful to Chaplain Susan Bishop and the Voices of Hope for their musical gifts and offering. Thank you to Dean Candler, his staff and the entire Cathedral family for their heart work and hard work which have provided this important evening. I must say that I am proud to be the bishop of a church that calls our city together to eat, worship God and remember the lives and deaths and souls of our most vulnerable men and women. This evening we make public, again, our commitment to "...respect the dignity of every human being." We do this by offering this funeral service – this home-going – for people all of us may not have known, but that God knows very well and loves.

A Requiem Mass is what the living come together to do for the dead. Everything we do this evening can be summed up in a simple prayer: "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." And that is exactly the perfect prayer for us to pray. But even as we pray this prayer, we know by faith that God has already answered it. Those who have died are, right now, at rest in God. We know this because we know God. And, we believe what the Bible says, that God is love. And, "God's love is from everlasting to everlasting. ..." Because that is true, we know that "God's mercy endures forever." And because we know that, we can say in the words of the 139th Psalm: "There is nowhere we can go where God's spirit is absent. There is nowhere we can go to flee from God's presence. If we go to heaven, God is there. If we make our bed in Hell, God is there too."

So we are comforted this evening by our faith in a God who is able to give rest eternally to those whose bodies may have been sick and fatigued and perpetual light to those who lived outdoors in the dark corners of our city. We are comforted to know that God loves all of God's children so much, that death doesn't get the last word. Life gets the last word. That's what Jesus taught us. Heaven is a logical conclusion, if God is love. I thank God that we know there's a heaven. How about you? That there is a place where there is no more sighing or sorrow or sickness or anymore tears. A place where you don't have to be suspicious of your neighbor. Where you won't be defined by how much money you have. A place where you don't have to beg, or lie. A place where children are safe. Where you don't have wait to see the Physician. I'm glad to know there's a heaven. Glad that our father God has a house with many mansions so no one has to sleep outside. Glad that with the eyes of my spirit enlightened, I know there's a place with slow moving water. A place that smells like white gardenias. A place where there's sunshine eight days a week. Glad to know one day I'll see face to face my redeemer, who is my friend and not a stranger. Like Jesus told Martha, "Didn't I tell you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God." Life can be hard, but one minute of heaven can erase a lifetime of hell. I like how the hymn says it, "earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."

While we're thinking and praying for those who have died this evening, I hope they're in heaven praying for us. Because we need prayer. We need God's enduring mercy. Our country, our city and our church. Anytime a NFL referee can make \$200,000 a year and the average teacher in our country makes less than \$50,000 a year, something's wrong; we need prayer.

We need prayer anytime two millionaires who aspire to the presidency can repeatedly comfort the middle-class without mentioning the swelling numbers of poor people in the country, most of whom are children. Something is wrong; we need prayer. We need prayer because too many men and women – our soldiers– are coming home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan only to become sick, jobless and homeless. And when it comes to too many of our churches and too many people of faith, in response to all this there is not even a mumblin' word. Tragically, in too many instances, the church and the world quietly agree that the homeless and the destitute are to be avoided rather than included, endured rather than embraced. We need the dead, the great cloud of witnesses, to pray for us – to pray that the stones over our hearts would be rolled away and that we might walk out into new life, a new church.

And if those who have died care to pray for us, I hope they're praying that the imagination of the church would be set free. Just like Lazarus. I hope they're praying, "God loose the imagination of the church, unbind it." I hope they're praying, "Lord, "Help your church trust you enough to be what they are supposed to be. Help them believe unto hope and hope unto discipleship." It's good for us to be in church this evening. Good to be under Jesus' roof together. Because Jesus was the founder of the church; the author and pioneer of our faith, and Jesus knew what it was to be homeless. His father was a day laborer. His mother was an unwed teenage mother. He was born in a broken down barn. Had only the clothes on his back. Made meals out of the scraps of food he was given as he moved around. Had no permanent address. No ID. He spent the last night of his life outdoors praying in a garden. Was arrested like a panhandler. And he was buried in a borrowed tomb. Jesus knew what it was to be homeless. He knew what it was to be looked at with disdain. Didn't Jesus say, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head"?

Because of Jesus the church is forever connected to the homeless, the sick, the poor, the stranger, the prisoner, the hungry, the young, the fearful and the oppressed. You can't be Jesus' church without welcoming the homeless. You can be a religious institution, but you can't be Jesus' church. Jesus said, "I and the least among you are one." One. We are radically, spiritually connected. I am them. Absolutely indivisible! And so I want to say thank you to so many of you this evening, who by your presence here have not only honored us, but you have made us more of Jesus' church than we were previously. Thank you for helping us be our best and true self in Christ. Thank you for letting us be ourselves. My hope going forward is that we might be together more often in this place. The wealthy and the poor, the strong and the weak, the depressed and the hopeful, just like Jesus imagines his church. Just like heaven. No divisions, no appropriate intervals of being together. Just us together, with God. One big church choir.

If we could pledge ourselves to being this kind of church, Jesus' church, like Psalm 24, God would be glorified, high and lifted up. The doors and gates of our hearts would be open to God and to each other. And God would get all the glory. All of it.

"O for a thousand tongues to sing, my great Redeemer's praise the glory of my God and King the triumphs of His grace."  
Amen.