

Gonna Raise 'Em Up -- Proper 26C

It is God's will that I should lose nothing of all that has been given me, but raise it up on the last day. Gonna raise us up on the last day. That's what the book says and the kind of hope we feel when we hear these words is wondrous indeed. The ones we love will no longer be separated from us; the frustrations and regrets of this life will evaporate; there will be peace in the valley.

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, traditionally November 1. We acknowledge and rejoice in the promise God has made to us, the promise we accept in our baptism, that all shall be raised up. Unsuspecting visitors to St. Peter's by the Sea last Saturday found themselves in the midst of an All Saints celebration, Mexican style. Dia de Muertos, The Day of the Dead takes remembrance a step further: those who have shuffled off this mortal coil come back for a visit once a year to reassure us of the continuity and permanence of our existence in Christ. As our Collect sings, we are "knit together in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Christ" and we beg for the "grace so to follow thy blessed saints...that we may come to those ineffable joys that thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love thee." *The celebration of Dia de Los Muertos started here in the Americas far before the life of Jesus. Today the traditions are blended with 500 years of Christian culture surrounding the continuity of human existence outside our earthly tenure.*

One implication is that the gift of life is a commodity, a form of currency God uses to do good in the World if we choose. But the power of goodness itself continues beyond earthly life. Just think of the good that you have experienced in your lifetime. The good

continues to affect us long after its purveyors have died, because it is not gone from our hearts, even though they have gone from our hands. From now on we must acknowledge, as they do in Swahili: Kuonana kwaolewa, all our meetings are arranged by God. If the good continues outside the parameters of biology and rationality, then just what is it we're hoping for, when is this last day anyway; why all the waiting? We can enjoy the Kingdom now, if we will.

In the 4th Century, the great Church father Gregory of Nyssa described the results of such a choice: "Christ has accomplished an actual fellowship with humankind...it is in baptism that a resemblance develops between those who follow and Him who leads the way... Our human minds cannot thread the maze of this life unless we pursue the same path He did. By maze, I mean that prison of death that leaves no exit and encloses us... Nature does not allow us an exact or entire imitation, but our sins are indeed suppressed by the sign of death that's given by water in baptism. Sin is not completely wiped away, but there is a kind of break in the continuity of evil." And who doesn't want a kind of break in the continuity of evil?

Sin is not completely wiped away. That would be an understatement. And everybody's in on the action; sin-free living has yet to be accomplished by anybody human. God's investment in this commodity called human life is a risky one – aggressive I think is the term – God really wants a big profit from this venture, but won't manipulate the market or trade on the sly, as an "insider" would do. We are the ones who have to choose: We may.

If God is counting on us to work the good in the world if it is to be worked at all, then perhaps we can say that to

be lifted up is to become a citizen of a different society than the one that seems the most obvious and instinctive choice. To be lifted up is to embrace another culture from the ones we so often reported on in the news, depicted in entertainment and advertised for sale. Our desire, our longing for connection with a living Christ whose story proves beyond doubt that goodness transcends death is the visa to this land and culture. Our response to God's invitation to Cain: "Timshel; Thou mayest," determines our spiritual nationality. When we say, "Yes, please," we are 'lifted up.'

But what about this Last Day business? You might not remember Chuck Dederich. His Synanon organization was initially a drug rehab program down in Santa Monica. Ultimately it became a cult, "The Church of Synanon," but disbanded in 1989 due to many defiantly criminal activities, including attempted murder, and pesky legal problems such as Federal tax-evasion.

Maybe we don't remember Chuck, but we do remember his famous motto: "Today is the First Day of the Rest of Your Life." It's catchy, it's exciting, it's motivating, and it's inarguable, in a rational sense. But if there's one thing this season of Halloween, All Saints, All Souls, El Dia de Muertos makes us aware of, it's that we are part of something far bigger than our careers here in the *Kasbah*. As they say in Tanzania, *Ajali muhuli*, "Our fate is but an interval," and rationality only gets us so far. Once we choose to live into our baptized life, to pursue goodness as best we can, we are connected beyond space and time to all others who have done the same; we are part of the 'body of Christ.' If our baptism

came when we were babies, a choice made by parents and elders for us, then we must choose again ourselves as grownups. But once we do, it is a permanent choice, and at the risk of nitpicking, there is no more first day of the rest of our lives.

This worldly portion of our human life, wherever it comes on the continuum of our spiritual existence, certainly contains crossroads, daily, even hourly pivot points when our response to God's invitation propels us either toward or away from goodness. But we cannot know, cannot even conceive of the extent of time before us; so there is no remainder to our lives, there is only eternity. It's the time that's gone before, on the other hand, that can be measured, more or less. It's X million years or 6 thousand-something years depending on who you voted for, plus the segment of one's own lifetime before choosing to believe Jesus' words: "They shall all be taught by God. No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day." The time that's been and gone before, that's the rest of my life; the time ahead is now: eternity. Which means today isn't the first day of the rest of my life, it's the last day of the rest of my life. This is the last day, and if we are listening, and choosing to follow, we are being raised up now, as much as we want to be, each and every one of us.