

The Sunday Missive – November 3, 2024

Celebrating All Saints Day

Hymn 287 For All the Saints

For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
Who thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blessed. Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might;
Thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness drear, the one true light. Alleluia, Alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest;
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Alleluia, Alleluia!

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The king of glory passes on his way. Alleluia, Alleluia!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ML6WFskgYI>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9

The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality.

Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever. Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones, and he watches over his elect.

Psalm 24

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it* ***The world and all who dwell therein.***

For it is God who founded it upon the seas* ***And made it firm upon the rivers of the deep.***

Who can ascend the hill of the Lord?* ***And who can stand in God's holy place?***

Those who have clean hands and a pure heart* ***Who have not pledged themselves to falsehood, nor sworn by what is fraudulent.***

They shall receive a blessing from the Lord* ***A just reward from the God of their salvation.***

Such is the generation of those who seek the Lord* ***Of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.***

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; lift them high* ***That the King of glory may come in.***

Who is this King of glory?* ***It is the Lord, strong and mighty***

Revelation 21:1-6a

I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy

city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

Hymn 620 Jerusalem, my happy home

Jerusalem, my happy home, when shall I come to thee?
When shall my sorrows have an end? Thy joys when shall I see?

Thy saints are crowned with glory great; they see God face to face;
They triumph still, they still rejoice in that most happy place.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, God grant that I may see
Thine endless joy, and of the same partaker ever be!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5J21--w5E6k>

John 11:32-44

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

They Are Not Gone – All Saints B

“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. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.” Gonna raise us up on the last day. That’s what the man said 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 acknowledge and rejoice in the promise God has made to us, the promise we accept in our baptism, that all shall be raised up. Philosophers argue endlessly, trying to understand whether God made up humankind or vice-versa, but in this house, this family chooses to accept the gift of peace that surpasses understanding by believing in Christ Jesus.

Hereabouts this past week, we have been in the midst of *Los Dias de Muertos*, The Days of the Dead. Scholars trace the origins of the modern Mexican fiesta to indigenous observances dating back to the [Aztecs and their festival](#) dedicated to the [goddess Mictecacihuatl](#). The holiday has spread throughout the hemisphere, being absorbed within other deep traditions for honoring the dead. As our church year winds to its conclusion, we too have a way of connecting with those who have gone before in this, the Feast of All Saints. We remember those who have shuffled off this mortal coil and reassure one another of the

continuity and permanence of our spiritual existence. As our Collect proclaims, “We are knit together in one fellowship: the mystical body of Christ.”

Perhaps more than at any other time, water moves into a central position in our consciousness when we consider life and death and continuity. The recent, magnificent movie treatments of Frank Herbert’s seminal novel *Dune* treat the subject of water with sublime insight. The story takes place far in the future, on a planet where water is extremely scarce and every drop of it must be conserved. Disturbing parallels to contemporary crises spring to mind. So, in the story when someone dies, the water in their body is preserved for the use of the living, the people in the story wear special suits that preserve and reuse all of their moisture, and their dwellings are built to save every particle of moisture, filtered and re-used for drinking – again. “It’s sweat and tears,” says one character. The fundamental dependence upon water for life is what gives the story its stunning resonance.

How like our own storytelling, especially at this time of year. When the elaborate and beautiful *Ofrendas* are set up -- altars to welcome visits from the dead on *el Dia de Muertos* – they include a glass of water, since our loved ones must be thirsty after such a long journey back to see us. As we heard today in the passage from *Revelation*, to the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.” Not only that, no more water will be spilled, as God will wipe every tear from their eyes. And crying will be no more. For, as the psalmist insists, God has founded the earth on the seas And established it on the rivers.

Apart from his death, which proves to be temporary, and a couple of instances when he gets annoyed – with figs and pigs – perhaps the one moment when Jesus most fully participates in the human condition comes when he weeps at the death of his friend Lazarus. The Son of Man spills precious tears into the dust just the way we do, and joins us. We enact this confluence of divinity and humanity each time the Eucharist is celebrated: Perfect, life-giving water is mixed with the earthly, sin-cleansing blood of the vine as we consume and join the Christ. Little wonder that the Scots Gaelic word for whisky is *uisge beatha*, ‘water of life.’

In our celebration of All Saints we reiterate our declaration, as Solomon's Wisdom has it, that "*The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them; though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality.*" Weeping will cease and so will thirst. One implication of this permanence is that life is recognized as a divine commodity: a form of currency God uses to do good in the World. Furthermore, that power of goodness itself persists beyond this earthly life. Just think of the good that we ourselves have experienced in our lifetimes, the good that continues to affect us long after its purveyors have died. They are not gone from our hearts, though they have long gone from our hands. The good continues outside the parameters of biology and rationality.

If you visit the Steinbeck Museum in Salinas, with its exhibit of his books and their origins, look for a wooden box in the *East of Eden* section, about the size of a top dresser drawer. The author carved it for a friend. Engraved on the lid is the Hebrew word, *Timshel*, meaning 'Thou mayest,' which Steinbeck describes as the central theme of his novel. God says *Timshel* to Cain while kicking him out into the wilderness (east of Eden) for killing his brother Abel: "Thou mayest now rule over sin." Which means, instead of ever being controlled by God, Cain has the capacity to choose his character, so too have we all.

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...in baptism a resemblance develops between those who follow and Him who leads the way... Nature does not allow us an exact imitation, but our sins are indeed suppressed by the sign of death given in water of baptism. Sin is not completely wiped away, but there is a kind of break in the continuity of evil."

Now who doesn't want to be part of a break in the continuity of evil? 'Sin is not completely wiped away?' Yes, that would be a substantial understatement. And everybody here is in on the action to some extent: sin-free living has yet to be accomplished by anybody. God's investment in this commodity called human life is a risky one – 'Bullish' I think is the term – God really wants a big profit from the venture, but She won't manipulate the market or trade inside. God will

not interfere. Instead, we are the ones who must continually choose more thoughtful and accountable lives. We must because we may.

If God is counting on us to work good in the world, to be lifted up is to become part of a different society than some of our most instinctive choices would dictate. To be lifted up is to embrace another culture from the one we so often see reported in the news, depicted in entertainment and advertised for sale or election to office. Our desire is the visa to this new land. Our longing for connection with the living Christ gets us in. Our response to God's invitation: "Timshel; Thou mayest," determines our spiritual "nationality."

Many of us remember the slogan: "Today is the First Day of the Rest of Your Life." It was a catchy, exciting and motivating phrase. But if there's one thing this season of Halloween, All Saints Day, and *el Dia de Muertos* makes us aware of, it's that we are part of something far bigger than our stay here in the campground. Our fate is but an interval. Once we choose baptized life, we are connected beyond space and time. If our baptism came when we were babies, a choice made by parents and elders for us, then we must choose again ourselves. But once we do, it is a permanent choice, and at the risk of nitpicking, the day we do that is the one and only first day of the rest of our lives.

This earthly sojourn surely contains crossroads, pivot points whereupon our response to God's invitation sets us in motion either toward or away from goodness. Things develop. Stuff happens. But if we think in eternal terms, we cannot know or even conceive of the extent of time before us; and there is no remainder to our lives, only eternity. There are no markers, no measures of time or space beyond this moment. We are baptized people, and so we are forever alive in the risen body of Christ. Which means today isn't the first day of the rest of my life, if anything, it's the last day of the first part of my life. This is the last day; we are being raised up now, as much as we choose to be, each and every one; each and every day, which is why we can say, with our Swahili sisters and brothers, "*Bwana Asifiwe!*" 'Praise the Lord.'

Hymn 625 Ye holy angels bright

Ye holy angels bright, who wait at God's right hand,
Or through the realms of light fly at your Lord's command,
Assist our song, for else the theme
Too high doth seem for mortal tongue.

Ye blessed souls at rest, who ran this earthly race
And now, from sin released, behold your Savior's face,
His praises sound, as in his sight
With sweet delight ye do abound.

Ye saints, who toil below, adore your heavenly King,
And onward as ye go some joyful anthem sing;
Take what he gives and praise him still,
Through good or ill, who ever lives!

My soul, bear thou thy part, triumph in God above:
And with a well-tuned heart sing thou the songs of love!
Let all thy days till life shall end,
Whate'er he send, be filled with praise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAwTDwbVM3o>

The Silver Thread

The fern gathers where the water seldom goes
unless the storms swell this world of wise choices,
the loud trickle of clear tongues of the stream
licking the edges of rock, while up ahead a curve
hides tomorrow from our crystal ball, the thing
we are afraid to admit we have, the guarantee
we hide from faith. In the woods our dog is lost
from time to time, until suddenly we hear her paws
inside winter's death becoming the yearly promise
of new undergrowth, her careless paws that beg
each day for the next bowl of treats, true faith
in what love yields. The rain stops not long after
it threatens to soak us with cold and chills, the trees
open to the gradual break of blue inside the gray,
turning the clouds naked and white under the sun,
the stream disappears under a bridge made by men
so trucks can crawl back and forth over this road
of dirt with its one row of grass, where our tongues
make a silver thread finding its way past the fear.

Afaa Michael Weaver