

All Saints Day

To hear some people tell it, the purpose of our faith is to impose on the rest of the nation whatever values supposedly define Christianity.

And so these days, we hear increasing rhetoric about Christian Nationalism, which is actually a form of right wing nationalism, dressed up in religious clothing.

It has precious little to do with Jesus.

It's got a lot to do with money and power and prestige.

You know: the three deadly temptations that Jesus rejected in the desert.

Those temptations are on full display today and rather than follow our Lord's lead and reject them, how many so-called Christian leaders are giving heart and soul to embrace them?

Christian Nationalism is a rallying cry for some NOT because of Jesus, but because of our all too human desire to be in a position of power over others.

And maybe that's why we celebrate, rather than condemn, war and greed and "me first."

Because in our heart of hearts, we so often have no faith in a God who invites us to meet him in weakness.

Who refuses to coerce.

Who pays the price of waiting for our love.

On this All Saints Day, Jesus again reminds us of how different God's ways are from our ways, and how much bending we must do in order to become real, whole and at peace.

Today, Jesus invites us into the deepest mysteries of our faith.

These mysteries aren't about rituals or secret knowledge.

But they will, if accepted, shake us to our very core.

These mysteries will challenge all of our dearly held assumptions, about ourselves, about one another.

And they will, in due time, bring us to that narrow door.

To the entryway of the Kingdom of God.

But not before turning our whole world upside down!

Some have called today's gospel lesson the Constitution of the Church.

Hear it once again.

"But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.

And from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.

Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

Do to others as you would have them do to you." Lk. 6:28-31.

Can we do these things?

I can't.

Maybe you can't either.

But we can!

There's an old saying in Africa that reminds us:

"Go faster alone, go farther together."

We need each other if we're to live into the kingdom that Jesus is creating, even today, on this earth.

As our body politic fractures, as news media give screaming headlines to all kinds of superficial nonsense, as fears and insecurities are exploited and as racism and bigotry become normalized, we need each other.

Our calling as Christians is to DO what Jesus says we must do, today.

As the writer once said:

“Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, it has been wanted, but rarely tried.” G.K. Chesterton.

We need each other.

And we find our common ground in loving each other, even when we become enemies, even when we must turn the other cheek, or walk the extra mile.

NOT because we are naive or afraid.

But because the power that holds all creation together chooses to flow through us only when we become – vulnerable.

And if we fear that living that way will lead to our annihilation, we need only look to our Lord, who lived this way!

Who was annihilated!

And who, lo and behold, after three days, is raised into a new and marvelous, eternal life.

If we do what Jesus does, we will become like him too!

But we cannot do what Jesus does all by ourselves.

We need each other!

Which is precisely why our Lord assures us that when two or three are gathered in his name, he is here, among us.

Here's a story some of you have heard before, but it's worth repeating.

It's about a 400 year old stump in Ireland — that's still alive!

Which baffles the scientists because trees, like people, must break down sugars to survive.

To do that, they need branches and leaves.

This is a stump!

Yet, it's alive.

How?

What the scientists discover is that the trees surrounding the stump feed it.

Which led these same scientists to discover that the trees of the forest are constantly feeding each another.

Like trees, we need each other!

What keeps us separated?

Perhaps this.

We live within our own world views, without realizing it is OUR world view.

Without realizing that the fellow over there lives in a totally different world than me, with different expectations.

With different understandings.

In other words, we don't see things the way they are, we see things the way WE are!

Which is why this place, our beloved St. Elizabeth's, this community of prayer for all people, is so beautiful!

Here, our worlds collide in a place that is open to understanding and insight and forgiveness.

So that in cracking open my world and cracking open your world we together may come to see our world through new eyes.

We need each other!

On Halloween night, for years, we took our teens to Oahu cemetery, to sing a hymn and to hear the powerful words of the prophet Ezekiel who looked out over that vast valley filled with dry bones.

And as his gaze took in fields of devastation, here comes the unmistakable voice of God asking him:

“Will these bones live again?!”

We go to the cemetery to remember that those buried there once stood where we stand.

We go to remember that one day, we too shall occupy graves just like theirs.

We go to remember that our hope is not in being the one who dies with the most toys!

Our hope is not in becoming a disembodied spirit strumming a harp on a cloud!

Our hope is in resurrection!

Our hope is in a new, eternal, transformed body, pure gift from our loving God!

When ankle bones connect to shin bones, when nerves and muscle and sinew reappear, when skin and blood and brains are again created, when newly formed throats shout out again - Hallelujah!

All Saints Day reminds us that saints are not the shiny soaped up pure people who never do anything wrong.

All Saints Day reminds us that WE, together, helping each other, supporting each other, challenging each other, WE are the saints of God!

"It is we who are blessed - we, the broken saints, the forgiven sinners." Nadia Bolz-Weber.

I leave you with this.

It's from a letter that Thomas Merton writes to a fellow who dedicated himself to these very challenges of Jesus, yet who finds himself frustrated with how little seems to change in the world.

Merton responds to that frustration, writing:

"Don't depend on the hope of results.

When you're doing the sort of work you've taken on, the apostles work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and achieve no result at all.

As you get used to this idea, concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself.

In the end, it's not results, but relationships, that save everything."
J. Forrest, paraphrased.

So on this day of All Saints, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him.

So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

What are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints.

And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe." Eph 1:15-16, modified.

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