

All Saints Sunday
2 November 2008
First Corinthians 15

All Saints and The Communion of Saints

Besides the first Sunday in November, the main times I think of all saints are at funerals. I know most of the people whom I bury. They're my friends and companions on the way that we call the Christian life. Some I've known for over thirty years. For others, it's fewer years, but the friendship is just as good. These friendships are composed of not just the emotions of friendly attraction, but of shared knowledge, shared values, shared commitments, and a deep-down-at-the-core *caring* about the welfare of the other. It is what the theologians who think about this sort of thing name as one of the types of love. On the natural level it is a form of wonderful friendship. On the supernatural level it is a form of life itself, the spiritual form of blood running through our arteries and veins, a parallel to the Blood of Jesus that vivifies our individual lives and our corporate life as the church, the community of the faithful, the family who call God our Father and Jesus our Brother and God's Spirit our Lord. On the supernatural level, we are Jesus – at least, that is what Saint Paul said.

In his first letter to that difficult church at Corinth in Greece, Paul wrote, "God baptized each of us and made us part of the body of Christ. Now we each drink from that same Spirit.... Together you are the body of Christ. Each one of you is part of his body." (12.13, 27) On the supernatural level, we are Jesus. Now isn't that a scary thought? I don't think Paul was talking in a metaphorical manner here. He was a mystic, a religious see-er into the heart of reality. I think he meant this literally. I think he saw in a mystic vision the very life blood of Christ coursing through the arteries of those who call on the name of the Savior. I think he saw the community of believers not just as an

assemblage of those who believe alike but rather as the people whom the Spirit of God glues together with the DNA of Christ. The life force of Christ, which is the life force of God, vivifies, nourishes, protects, energizes the people of God. We're talking about you here, you and me, and every Christian, and, I suspect, when we get to see the whole picture after death, the entire human race, and surely whatever races there might be beyond the stars.

Because Saint Paul is also the greatest theologian of the resurrection, he saw what the resurrection of Jesus meant for the rest of us, for these beloved sisters and brothers of Christ, for those whom the Spirit inhabits. Paul saw that the glory of being Christ's Body here and now, in the realm of planet earth, does not end with death, but is continued, yes, even strengthened, by resurrection into a new kind of life in which we are even closer to God, even more like, God. Paul saw Jesus alive after death with new power and greater glory as the indicator, the promise, the pioneer, the first of many, that will live as He does – forever. There is only one resurrection, come to us because of God's passionate love. Jesus is the first of the resurrected but our resurrected life is just as certain as His. Listen to what Paul writes a little later in that same *First Corinthians* letter: “If our hope in Christ is good only for this life, we are worse off than anyone else. But Christ has been raised to life! And he makes us certain that others will also be raised to life.... Christ will bring life to all of us.... The last enemy Christ destroys will be death.... These bodies will die, but the bodies that are raised will live forever. These ugly and weak bodies will become beautiful and strong. As surely as there are physical bodies, there are spiritual bodies. And our physical bodies will be changed into spiritual bodies.... The bodies we now have are weak and can die. But they will be changed into bodies that are eternal. Then the Scriptures will come true, ‘Death has lost the battle! Where is its victory? Where is its sting?’” (15.19, 19-20, 22, 26, 42-44, 54-55)

You see, we are resurrected as cells in the Body of Christ. He is already resurrected, and we, in our turn, are added into His Body. Our

resurrection is really His resurrection -- and therefore guaranteed with the power of God.

All this leads me back to funerals, to the loss and grief we feel when one of us dies. I think the emotional and spiritual pain would be unbearable if loss, if death, were the last word. But that is not the case. These whom we must let go from us temporarily as they enter into the next part of the adventure – these are not lost to us permanently. We are separated by the difference in the way the grace of God operates in our lives, but we are united in the one Body of Christ, that includes us all, that is eternal, that is blissful. Love conquers death. Love unites all whom God loves into one great living reality, a reality that encompasses those who are now living on this planet with those who lived on it before us. This is what All Saints is all about. It is the celebration of the life of Christ, the Body of Christ, each and every person who has ever been and who is still inhabited by the Spirit of God. It is a wonderful vision of life and love.

These saints, these chosen of God, these who belong to God – some of them we know their names, the great heroes and heroines of our people: Peter, Andrew, Mark, Mary, Elizabeth, Francis, Theresa, Benedict, Scholastica, Clare, Ann, Christopher, Juliet. We could go on for hours naming names and telling stories and never exhaust the roll call. But these are just the famous. They are far outnumbered, perhaps even outclassed, by the unknown, the little ones, the obscure ones, our grandmothers, our uncles, our babies, all us common folk. We, too, are part of All Saints.

How, then, should we live? What difference does this make to our day-to-day living? There are several, I think. One is that we are people who live every moment in hope, that attitude of trust that pulls us into the future: all will be well. What we are and what we love will not be lost to us but rather restored and confirmed to us as resurrected pieces of the Body of Christ. Another is that we can live lives of peace, peace of

mind, peace of spirit, peace of soul, peace of body – for we will not lose anything. All that we are and have will be ours and a billion times more, incomprehensible as the grace and love of God. Another is that we can live lives of generosity, for what we give away of ourselves, our treasure, our time, our talents, simply comes back to us in the fullness of time. No one ever loses by giving. Another is that we can live lives of passionate love, engaged with one another, caring, sacrificing, becoming great with the wonder of love. Love is eternal, far more powerful than death, and it is to eternity and to love that we belong.

Happy All Saints Day.