

All Saints Day
November 1, 2015
Year B

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“And the one who seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’” In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning, all you saints and should ain'ts. How many of you are saints? Raise your hands. Actually, every hand be up. Everyone who has been baptized is a saint. For the word “saint” simply means a holy one. Someone who has been set aside for God’s purposes. That means everyone who has been initiated into Christ’s body, the Church, in baptism is a member of God’s holy people, and is, therefore a saint.

[In a few minutes we and God together will make Keely Ann Reed into a saint, when we baptize her.]

The great thing about being a saint is that we need never fear death again. We are baptized into Jesus’ death and resurrection. We come pre-killed. We get to live this life as if we were already in the next. Why is Halloween—which, as you know, is simply a contraction of “All Hallows Even”, that is, the Eve of All Saints Day— why is Halloween so full of ghosts and skeletons? Why are the readings we have just heard the same as for a funeral? Because for us saints, for us who are in Christ who has passed through death and lives forever, when death comes to our bodies, life is changed not ended. For us death is not the end, but a new beginning. Death is our entry into glory.

Hear again the words of Holy Scripture. The first was written a couple of centuries before Christ. Even then the wise understood that life continued after death. “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.” Our hope is full of immortality.

Then comes the vision of St. John the Divine when he is granted of vision of the world to come: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... 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.’” How wonderful: death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain, will be no more. See I am making all things new.”

This is the reality that we are moving towards in every moment of this life. Just as the earth becomes light at dawn before the sun fully rises, so we live in the light of the world that is coming but not yet fully here.

Yet in this life, there are times when it is hard to see that light or to remember the glory to which we are bound. Loss, pain, grief come, as they must, and we lose the vision. This is the poignant story of our Gospel this morning. Among Jesus’ closest friends was a family of two sisters and a brother, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, who lived in Bethany. Lazarus fell seriously ill, and they sent word to Jesus so that he would come and make Lazarus well. But Jesus did not come. Lazarus died, and then Jesus came. As Jesus approached the house, Mary ran out. She is angry and disappointed. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Where the heck have you been?” Jesus asks to be shown where the grave is. Then comes the shortest verse

in the Bible: “Jesus wept.” He, too, was overcome with the pain of loss that is part of any death. In fact the text mentions Jesus’ grief three times. The tomb was a cave with a stone lying across its mouth. Jesus tells them to remove the stone, but Martha objects saying, “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 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.” Now this is not the same as the resurrection. Lazarus was restored to his normal human life, and presumably died at some later time. The point of the story is that Jesus has authority over life and death.

More than that, though, this is a story of how it is to live this life in the light of the Resurrection. The worst thing is never the last thing. We experience death before we die in many ways. A great disappointment. A great loss. A betrayal. A great sin that we have committed. All of these can feel like death. The death of life as we have known it. We feel we are in some dark, airless place. We feel we are bound so that we cannot move. We no longer can move or breathe or see. Yet we are baptized into Jesus. And our lord and master does come.

And sometimes we are bound, and not seeing or breathing, and we do not even recognize our condition. And then, too, Jesus comes. And for all of us, again and again. Jesus is “disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.” For us and our pain, Jesus weeps. And again and again. Jesus comes to us and says those mighty words, “Unbind him and let him go.”

This is the Gospel. This is why we are baptizing Keely today. This is why we gather to worship our loving and mighty Lord. Because we have been set free to live our lives in the light of that new and dawning day. We are called to live lives in which all things are made new again

and again. We are called to march forward into that new world the God is delighted to make in which death and sorrow are no more. Let us come to this table and receive God's life. Let us hear Jesus say of each of us this day, "Unbind him and let him go."