

The Sunday Missive – October 29, 2023 All Saints Day

Hymn 287 For all the saints, who from their labors rest

For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
Who thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy Name, O Jesus, be for ever 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!

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!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Alleluia, Alleluia!

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

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.*

Isaiah 25: 6-9

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,

of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

It will be said on that day,

Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save
us.

This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation* ***Whom shall I fear?***

The Lord is the stronghold of my life* ***Of whom shall I be afraid?***

There is but one thing I ask of the Lord* ***Only this do I seek:***

To live in the house of the Lord* ***All the days of my life,***

To gaze on the beauty of the Lord* ***To inquire at his temple.***

I believe I shall see the Lord's goodness* ***Here in the land of the living.***

Wait for the Lord; be strong* ***Be of stout heart and wait for the coming of the Lord!***

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

1 Corinthians 15: 50-58

What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but

we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

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,
God's praises sound, as in his sight
With sweet delight ye do abound.

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=ajhDN0DibGg&t=18s>

John 6: 37-40

Jesus said, "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has 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."

Semana de Muertos -- 2023

This is an action-packed week, churchwise, with All-Hallows' Even (that is Halloween), All Saints Day, and All Souls Day lined up on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday the way they are. Of course, they're always lined up, so we can observe the progression – from the outer limits to the up close and personal – that will afford us a true and satisfying sense of how precious each of us is in the realm of God. On Halloween, the costumes and images and decorations are all about legendary or outrageous characters from our cultural history – The Mummy, The Creature from the Black Lagoon, The Jester. On All Saints Day, the Church officially celebrates figures from religious history, people who actually lived, but who lived extraordinarily. The Saints are those whose lives stand as examples for the rest of us, examples of how we might try to live ourselves if we dare. And then All Souls Day, *el Dia de Muertos*, which belongs to all who have passed through this life, each and every soul; various and sundry; exemplary and uninspiring, the only requirement being that somebody cares to remember them. We will have moved in the direction Jesus is always trying to get his disciples to go: from the mythological to the historical to the personal; from the theory of Creation to the saga of a people to the story of one child whose kin each of us could and would be.

Doing a little light reading this week, in preparation for today, I was flipping through the Roman Catholic Office for the Dead. This jumped out spookily: "*Timor Mortis Conturbat Me:*" "Fear of death disturbs me." Indeed. How can we hope to create more space in our lives for goodness and godliness when our time grows ever shorter? We simply

must acknowledge, accept and avail ourselves of power beyond ourselves, power that flows from and to beyond the banks of earthly life, power that was and is and is to come. As the great thinker Pascal liked to say, "Happiness is neither inside us nor outside us, it is in God."

Isaiah, the Psalmist, St. Paul and Jesus all preach beautifully on this subject in today's readings: "The Lord is my light and my help. Whom then shall I fear? I long to live in the house of the Lord, for there I am safe in the day of evil and now my head shall be raised!" cries the psalmist. And Isaiah: "O Lord, my God you have done wonderful things. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm, the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled. On this mountain you make for all peoples a feast of rich food, of well-aged wines strained clear. You destroy the sheet that is spread over all nations wipe away the tears from all faces ; you swallow up death forever – the appalling shroud of death."

This is the immortality of which Paul speaks too; death becomes moot: "Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this happens, the saying will be fulfilled: 'Where is your victory, O death; where is your sting?' Therefore be steadfast; in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

What a preacher! An attitudinal Change brings about for us a cosmic change. In the ways of the Lord, we are already a success; we are already fulfilled. Our thoughts and energies move from Stuff to People to Ideas – the move is from status-granting acquisitions to inner-circlings to unconditional love and gratitude for love's employment. From personalities to principles. We acquire what Paul Tillich called the Courage to Be.

Courage cannot happen without a foundation of faith. This is an attitude and outlook on life that allows people to overcome obstacles, but also to remain aware that perfection, while perhaps a goal, is not in any way a requirement. In French, there is a great word, *soubassement*.

Obviously related to our word 'sub-basement,' *soubassement* means much more than the dirt- and equipment-filled space under a basement where we crawl around looking for skeletons once we've gone through all the closets. *Soubassement* has a strong metaphorical meaning, the foundation of something, the basis of a life or relationship or society. What every human soul gets is the invitation to the great banquet of which Isaiah and Paul both speak. What the Saints acquire, develop and nurture is a *soubassement* of awareness, the awareness of their blessedness. Even when life becomes difficult, frightening, or endangered, when there is flooding in the basement, cracks in the living room, too many toys in the attic and a leaky roof, this awareness persists; even when terrible things are perpetrated by others' cruelties.

It's not that Saints believe God's blessings are possible, they know God's blessings are real. Without this foundation, this *soubassement*, the courage we need to follow Jesus' formula is impossible to summon. It's like trying to stand up on an air mattress, floating in the water. We can dance around quite a bit, and even get balanced for a few seconds, but soon enough, down we go.

The Saints will teach us to know as well if we allow ourselves to become true pupils. This requires an open heart, a receptive mind, and a ready appetite for truth, things that ebb and flow in most of us. As a great man once said, "All of our earthly knowledge is like clouds covering the sun. Only the breaking of these clouds and the clearing of the sky, in other words purity of heart, will give the capacity for the knowledge of God."

They will teach us to adopt the attitude that faith can be involved in every aspect of my life; that it is because of faith that our life has meaning and purpose and a sense of inner peace. And our behaviors will change accordingly. Perhaps we will spend some time in prayerful contemplation every day. We might find ourselves forgiving people who have hurt us deeply, or called more compellingly to develop our given talents and strengths. We may even take unpopular stands based on what faith reveals and be open to truths we have been in the habit of denying. We will be fed.

Jesus said to them, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. I have come to do the will of the one who sent me: that all who see and believe may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day. As it is written in the prophets, 'they shall all be taught by God.'"

That is some powerful preaching too. But we have to lift our fingers if these things are to come about. Thor Halvorsen, founder of the Oslo Freedom Forum observes, "People say the truth will win out, but it's hard for the truth to win out when on the other side there is an enormous machinery of propaganda and lawyers threatening defamation suits. Truth will win out, but it needs a little help." It's hard when rockets are raining down, no matter who launched them.

Or here's NYU Psychology Professor, Gabrielle Oettingen, talking about her book, *Rethinking Positive Thinking* "Why doesn't positive thinking work the way you might assume? Dreaming about the future calms you down, measurably reducing systolic blood pressure, but it can also drain you of the energy you need to take action... Positive thinking is pleasurable, but that doesn't mean it's good for us. What works is an approach that combines positive thinking with realism. Imagine your wish coming true, then spend a few minutes clarifying the obstacles that stand in the way."

Over the next few days – this *semana de muertos* -- we can spend a few minutes dreaming of our own paths to whatever form of sainthood life has in store for us. And we can spend a few minutes in realistic clarifying of the obstacles that might stand in our way – death itself for example – and maybe even shake our heads in amusement and wonder that no such obstacle need ever hold us back.

Hymn 618 Ye watchers and ye holy ones

Ye watchers and ye holy ones, bright seraphs, cherubim, and thrones,
Raise the glad strain, Alleluia!
Cry out, dominions, principedoms, powers,
Virtues, archangels, angels' choirs, Alleluia, alleluia

O higher than the cherubim, more glorious than the seraphim,
Lead their praises, Alleluia!
Thou bearer of the eternal Word, most gracious, magnify the Lord!
Respond, ye souls in endless rest, ye patriarchs and prophets blest,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Ye holy twelve, ye martyrs strong, all saints triumphant raise the song!
O friends, in gladness let us sing, supernal anthems echoing,
Alleluia, alleluia!
To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, Three in One,
Alleluia!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYMv Z-iJrc>

Life

I am in awe
of a perfect love
which magnifies living
so far beyond the imagination
it knows no bounds!

I can rejoice
in the rain and the sun
whose moisture and light
assure the continuance
which is life itself

I can rejoice
in the cycle of blossoms and leaves
whose silence in sleep
rebounds in the renaissance
which is Spring

I can rejoice
in the young forest creatures
whose exuberant energies

explode in the often aimless flights
which are youth

I can rejoice
in the wordless gratitude of pets
whose unhesitating companionship
guarantees the acceptance
which is contentment

I can rejoice
in the spontaneity of children
whose explorations and mimicry
satisfy the quest for awareness
which is growth

I can rejoice
in the laughter of close ones
whose strength of emotion
sustains the sensitive bond
which is friendship

I am in awe
of a profound empathy
which encompasses the heart
to a degree rarely felt –
it must be God-given!

Vivian Thompson