

110208 All Souls & In the Voting Booth

For years and years, members of my family have teased me because of my penchant for visiting cemeteries. I do admit that I love to stop – to look at tombstones and read inscriptions. I also pray for people whose remains are interred there. And in that vein, Saturday and Sunday are important days – Saturday the day of All Saints; today the day of All Souls. Speaking of honoring the dead: in Latin America – they celebrate El Dia de los Muertos – the Day of the Dead. Mexicans and others make altars covered with cloth and decorated with flowers and candles and food. In many places in Europe – Russia for example, they have deep and abiding love of their dead. Cemeteries fill with throngs – praying, fixing graves and visiting the beloved who are asleep. At evening time, people process with lit candles to the cemetery with everyone chanting litanies and singing hymns. People leave lit candles that might burn for hours as a sort of holy remembrance for other passersby to see. This has the same significance of leaving a lit candle here in Church to remind others to pray for your needs – your intentions.

America is a great country in so many ways.... But it has lost some of the special-ness for remembering and doing things like honoring the dead and taking care of cemeteries. Sadly, many Catholics have lost the custom of having Masses said for the deceased. When a Christian dies, the Church prays for the soul. Though baptized, he or she had been a sinner during his lifetime.

But faith in God still opens to him eternal life. And we can help with our prayers and by having Masses said for the dead. Are you one of those who think this talk of All Souls or of going to cemeteries is passé? A holdover from a more primitive time? That this is for other cultures, other times? Or has the world of today dented your faith so much that down deep inside you don't even have a real belief (A REAL belief) in the afterlife? Have you lost belief in the soul?

What is the soul? Why do we speak of it? Thomas Aquinas said the soul is the 'form' – he meant the animating energy of the body. Our current pope – when he was Joseph Ratzinger said that our soul corresponds to our capacity for relationship with God. He said we have a whole range of powers... intellectual, relational, emotional ... but underneath the powers that we have – we have the capacity to know and to love God. Only humans have this gift.

Our best proof – our best knowledge is from Scripture and from our Lord and Savior. Remember the words of the Biblical God who announced to Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." They were holy ones long dead – yet talked of as if living. And Jesus was transfigured on the Mount and spoke with Holy Ones, also long thought dead. Jesus was resurrected – what is it that you don't believe? What is it about All Souls that you dismiss? Today, those waiting for release and union with God... and those in Heaven – all of us here present -- today we are All Souls... today we are one family. Now I smile as I say to you, tell your family you want to go visit a cemetery. They may wonder what's gotten in to you. Place flowers.

Pull weeds. Pray for the souls of those who are in another realm but are probably needy of your help. Finally – today at the Epiclesis – that’s when Father extends his hands and invokes the Holy Spirit and starts the prayers of the Consecration – the veil is pierced and our loved ones are present here with us. Believe it... it’s true.

My second topic today is a brief discussion of the awesome task – the holy duty under the Commandment to Honor Father and Mother. Under this commandment we also inherit the moral obligation to vote. Mercifully, the presidential campaigns end Nov. 4. If you are open to the Spirit and the news, you are probably aware of the unprecedented activity by one group of American leaders: our Catholic bishops. Most have shared words like those of Bishop Larry Silva that “one issue alone far outweighs all others: the right to life.” Being ‘right’ on taxes, education, health care, immigration and the economy fails to make up for the error of disregarding the value of a human life.

If I had more time – I would ask if we have any visitors from out of state. I would do this because I have the words and teachings of bishops from many places around this great nation. Do we have visitors from Texas? Philadelphia? Omaha? Oregon? Milwaukee? From Patterson, NJ, Colorado Springs or Springfield, MO? Our Arizona bishops have spoken out for life – and they also encourage us to vote YES on Prop 102 to safeguard the dignity of marriage as a union of one man and one woman.

Reading what significant numbers of bishops have been saying in these times – we find the strongest teachings ever: Roe v. Wade is a clear case of an ‘intrinsically unjust law’ and we are morally obliged to oppose it. Now let me give you an example of this struggle about voting. A while back, I was in a meeting with my prior bishop Charles Chaput. In a moment of tender honesty and sharing – he said, “You do not know, you can’t possibly know how much of a Democrat I am in my heart.” He said he believes strongly in much of what that party professes. But ‘I cannot abide abortion under any circumstances.’ He became quiet – he seemed to almost become emotional – sad at what he faced when the curtain closes behind him.

Each of us meets truth in the voting booth. Truth isn’t opinion. Truth isn’t the party I like. There is one truth. I hope and pray ... And I believe you will treat this responsibility as the most important act of Christian democratic practice you have ever been involved in. Certainly we will stand before God for this vote and others.

Both political parties have made this an election based on the word change... CHANGE is what we need... I wonder if God’s voice isn’t speaking to us about change – through our bishops? And if we can’t or won’t accept what the Catholic Church is teaching – let me share words from another leader with you...

Dr. Billy Graham composed a prayer. You may have heard it because it was aired on Paul Harvey’s radio program. Dr. Graham, like many suggests that CHANGE IS NEEDED – but not in the way it’s been talked about.

Here is what Billy Graham wrote: 'Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know Holy Scripture tells us, 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that is exactly what WE have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem. We have abused power and called it politics. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression. We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment. Search us, Oh God, and cleanse us from every sin; set us free. Amen!'

And just to close with a Catholic thought – Fr. Benedict Groeschel spoke about many who have lost the will to fight for virtue and our faith. Fr. Groeschel wrote these words: "We must not be disheartened, but rather strengthened in our faith when we face persecution. We need to be prepared to accept opposition and hostility. We American Catholics are out of practice. In 1928, my own mother was dismissed from her first job because she listed on her application that she was a Roman Catholic. Eventually, Catholics ran that company! Things have gotten too easy. We have to get back into shape. We're spiritually flabby." On Tuesday – let's lose the flab – let us vote for a return to our Christian values. Thank you.

Reading 1

Wis 3:1-9

The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace. For if before men, indeed, they be punished, yet is their hope full of immortality; chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself. In the time of their visitation they shall shine, and shall dart about as sparks through stubble; they shall judge nations and rule over peoples, and the LORD shall be their King forever. Those who trust in him shall understand truth, and the faithful shall abide with him in love: because grace and mercy are with his holy ones, and his care is with his elect.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading II

Rom 5:5-11

Brothers and sisters: Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How much more then, since we are now justified by his Blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath. Indeed, if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by his life. Not only that, but we also boast of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

or

Rom 6:3-9

Brothers and sisters:

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. For a dead person has been absolved from sin. If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.

Gospel

Jn 6:37-40

Jesus said to the crowds: "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day."