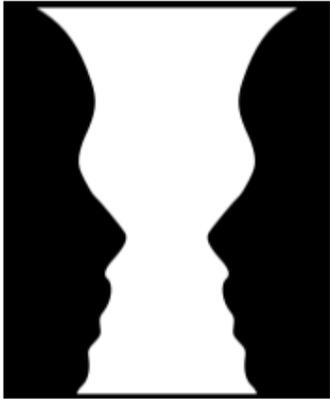


All Saints – Year B



I think we've all seen those pictures that are really two pictures in one. The most common are silhouettes – the one that comes most easily to mind for me is one that looks like a vase or urn, until your perspective shifts – and then you see two faces looking at each other. You might, in describing your experience with these pictures, say to someone, “I saw an urn, and then, when my perspective changed, I saw two faces, looking at each other!” -- In all my years of reading or hearing today's text from Revelation, this is the first time I heard this reading in that way. This time, I heard the writer saying – not that he's describing something from a vision of the future, but a description of what happened, what he saw, when his perspective changed. “I saw – when I looked at things differently – a *new* heaven and a *new* earth... and I realized, the home of God is among mortals...God dwells with us as our God, and we are God's people. God is *with* us!” And isn't that what we really profess that we believe? Isn't that the meaning of our belief in Incarnation – the meaning of naming Jesus “Emmanuel” – God with us?

This past Thursday night, some of us gathered here – in the quire – for Compline. It was technically the Feast of All Saints, November 1 – but it was also the eve of November 2nd, a day celebrated in the Book of Common Prayer as the “Commemoration of All Faithful Departed” – and so we read the Necrology – the names of those from this parish family who have died this past year and the names of our beloved who have gone before perhaps many years ago. The custom of setting aside a day for remembering our dead dates back to the Abbot of Cluny in 998 and included placing a list of the names of those to be remembered near the altar. In the Apostles Creed, we profess our belief in “the communion of saints” – a recognition that we – and all those who have gone before us – are really part of one great body in Christ. We are linked – those of us here with those we can no longer see... From one perspective, the dead are gone from our sight... but from another, they are with us here – and we form one great communion of saints.

There is a story Thomas Merton tells in his biography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. A friend asks him, "What do you want to want to be, anyway?" Merton says, "I don't know; I guess what I want to be is a good Catholic." And then Merton writes: "What you should say"--he told me--"what you should say is that you want to be a saint." Much later, in his book *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton writes: "For me to be a saint is to be myself."

In the same book, he explains: "A tree gives glory to God by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be it is obeying [God]. It "consents," so to speak, to [God's] creative love. It is expressing an idea which is in God and which is not distinct from the essence of God, and therefore a tree imitates God by being a tree..." -- "For me to be a saint is to be myself."

We're going to sing, shortly, a song of the saints of God – one a farmer, one a shepherdess, a queen, a soldier, a doctor – and finally, that – with God's help – we mean to be one, too! Merton has it right – for us to be saints is for us to be ourselves. And so we need to *know* ourselves – and the biggest part of that self for each of us is this: That we are, in Merton's words, "expressing an idea which is in God and which is not distinct from the essence of God...and therefore," now to paraphrase, "we imitate God by being ourselves." And to be *most* ourselves means for us to – again in Merton's words, "to 'consent' to God's creative love."

As Canon Missioner Anne Hallmark said in her homily yesterday at Convention, we have within us the power of infinite love. We have the power to love infinitely. But we're living in a time when we're encouraged to hate. We're encouraged, not to believe in and appreciate the communion of saints to which *all* of God's children belong, but to divide and separate, an imaginary us against an imaginary them. That hatred, that divisiveness – those are the powers of death that Isaiah promises God will destroy forever. For in God, there is no hatred, there is no division. There is only love. Infinite love. Infinite, creative love. That is the power that lives within us. That is the self we are called to be.

And in that context, our Gospel story today also takes on a new meaning for me. Because it's not Lazarus Jesus is calling to come forth – it's me, and you. Mary, come forth! Joan, come forth! David, come forth! We are called to come out of the tomb of despair, out of the darkness that surrounds us in these times, to discard the trappings of death that bind us and keep us from moving, and to *free one another* from those same trappings. We are called to live out infinite love – to see a new heaven and a new earth, here and now. We are called to "See, the home of God is among mortals." To believe indeed that God dwells with us, and that we are all God's people.

This feast of All Saints is a call for us to live out that truth, to live out that infinite love. How we do that will be different for each of us. Not all are teachers or prophets or farmers or poets. But all are saints. So just live out that infinite love in the self you are. Give witness to the power of resurrection by remembering those you love whom you can no longer see, on the one hand, but who we know to be present in this communion of saints. And give witness to your own call to be a saint by fighting the forces of hatred and death in whatever ways you can.

I think this week, that may mean voting.

Amen.

[Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9](#) [or Isaiah 25:6-9](#) [Psalm 24](#) [Revelation 21:1-6a](#) [John 11:32-44](#)