

“All Saints”

I. Introduction: The last time that I was here for worship, your guest preacher mentioned that he had been the first one to preach in this beautiful pulpit. It was not even grouted and he was fearful it might fall apart. This pulpit is the most concrete or if you will marble proof of the resurrection of the dead, that I know of. I do not know how many times that I have died in this pulpit, but behold I live. Thanks be to God.

- a. Believe it or not, this actually leads me into my sermon. In these last Sundays of the Christian year, beginning with All Saints Day, the BCP forces us to deal with the issue of eschatology; the theology of last things of life beyond the grave. It is a subject, that most of us avoid most of time. We approach it only when forced to do so such as a time of death or great tragedy. Times when death is both close and personal. Otherwise, we expend a great deal of spiritual and emotional energy avoiding the subject all together; except perhaps in humor. Everyone loves one of the pearly gate jokes or cartoons; which only proves how close fear and humor can be at times.

My favorite going away gift from this parish came from my Wednesday Bible study group. It is a framed quotation from Mark Twain's LETTERS FROM EARTH, a sort of early SCREW TAPE LETTERS. In it the earthly devil writing back to headquarters makes fun of the human race's vision of heaven. I won't quote it in a sermon, but Twain was amused that with all of the importance that we place on sex in this life, it is not to be found in heaven. On the other hand, most people cannot sing on earth, but hope to do so eternally in heaven.

- b. Our Gospel lesson introduces for the only time in Luke a group of religious leaders who thought even less of heaven than did Mark Twain, the Sadducees. They were the conservative religious establishment; in contrast to the Pharisees who were by comparison moderate reformers. They believed that only the first five books of the Bible were sacred. And since the Resurrection of the Dead was not mentioned there, they did not believe in it or in heaven. There was only sheole, a sort of cold storage warehouse of the dead.

They asked Jesus a question, not because they wanted an answer, but to ridicule the whole idea of resurrection and life after death that both Jesus and the Pharisees believed in. The law required that if a man died childless, then his brother would marry the widow and their first child would be heir to the dead brother. I am told this is still practiced in Africa. It reflected the ancient Jewish belief that the dead live on through their children. They stretch the law to the limits. They ask whose wife will be this widow who is childless after marrying eight brothers in succession.

Jesus takes them seriously, quoting from their own scripture...that the Lord is the God of the Living and not the Dead...but he takes the whole debate to a much higher level...The Sons of this age marry because it is required of this age to protect property and bloodlines, both of which will be meaningless in the age to come...because once raised we cannot die again; BECAUSE WE WILL BE EQUAL TO ANGELS AND WILL BE SONS OF GOD.

- II. The Saducess wanted to reduce everything to literal truth. Jesus asks us to consider a GREAT MYSTERY. The great Mystery that we proclaim at each Eucharist. CHRIST HAS DIED, CHRIST IS RISEN, CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN.

Dean Ness of the Cathedral in New Orleans taught that an inigma is something that becomes darker the deeper you get into it. A mystery is something that becomes lighter.

Paul in First Corinthians 13 and again in Romas 8 teaches us that love is the one thing that never ends, not even at the grave. Everything that we have and know about will pass away. The love of God revealed to us in Christ Jesus is eternal. And as the Prayer Book teaches us, that is our reasonable and holy hope to be reborn into that love.

Each Eucharist is a foretaste of that heavenly banquet where we will gather not as husband and wives but as brothers and sisters and sons and daughters of our Father in heaven who know and calls us each by name.