

All saints day

All Saints Day is a bittersweet day, I think. It's a celebration of eternal life won by Jesus for his people. But there is also the obvious aspect that those people got sick, or some tragedy came, and they aren't with us anymore. All Saints Day is not some celebration or glorification of death, no, death is the last enemy to be destroyed. Death is the consequence of sin in a broken world. Death is a wicked, evil, thing that takes the child in the womb, the aged in the nursing home, and all in between. And in no case is it ever fun, or good, or easy, or convenient, or merciful.

And it is something so bitter, that I think we are tempted to put up walls around our hearts because the pain of losing someone we truly love would be too great. To truly love is to be truly vulnerable. To love is to say, "I am invested in you. And if you should leave, or say that angry word, it will hurt." And of course, that person very well may love you back, and be open and vulnerable and caring to you. But, lets face it, in this broken world, eventually, eventually, one of you will leave the other. And so it is not uncommon for someone to die and a loved one to be angry at them. "How could you leave me!?" And it's irrational, and they know it, but it doesn't make it any less true. They left them and that causes them pain.

To truly love is to open your heart to be truly, deeply hurt. To open yourself to the opportunity to truly grieve, to truly mourn. And so Jesus tells us today, on the day

we remember those who have left us, he tells us “blessed are those who mourn.”

But I think it might be fair for the person mourning to respond, “Well, Lord, if this is what it feels like to be blessed, maybe I don’t want to be blessed anymore.”

And so again, we put walls up around our hearts. We keep people at arm’s length. We don’t let them in. We push them away, lest they get too close and then leave us, and yes that too is irrational but. “at least the pain comes on my terms when I push that person away.” And in our close relationships we say things like, “Well, I want to go first, because then I don’t have to mourn.” Because we know that since we are so connected, so vulnerable, it’s going to hurt. A lot. Even as it is a bit bittersweet because it means you’d be ok with the other person bearing that burden. What’s my point: It’s that we know this: to “love is to invite pain.

It's why Tom Sawyer shows up to his own funeral. How many people are there? Who really cared about me? Who’s crying the most?” It’s why the angry, bitter, depressed teen takes their own life, “Oh I will make them hurt, maybe then they will think about me.”

But this pain also invites so many other complicated emotions. What if you are at the funeral and you aren’t crying? Maybe you’re numb, maybe you’re too angry, too shocked, maybe it hasn’t hit yet. But now you feel guilty because you are mourning differently. And the years go by. And the wound heals a little bit, but

maybe not as fast as someone else. Does that mean you loved less or just mourn differently? How much and how tight do you hold on? And then Mom has a new boyfriend. Does that mean she doesn't love dad anymore or does it mean she's lonely and has come alongside someone else who understands the wounds she still has? Ah!

And you wonder why people struggle with this stuff? It's hard. It's deep. These people are a part of us. And then they are gone and there is an open wound that time alone will never fully heal.

And so the option, again, is to put up walls, keep people at arm's length, disengage. But folks, that's not who God made us to be. To be too afraid of the pain means you lose out on the love. And what is that but living in fear and without the fullness of the good that God has for you? And what is that but to live an incomplete, and a little bit sad, life? In fact, I can think of few things more loving than to know that it will hurt to love this person but choose to love them anyway.

And then I think of God's love. He knew we would fall away when he made us. He knew what it would cost to save us, lots of rejection, lots of pain, a cross and tomb. But you know what he did? He loved us anyway. And so it is in his example of sacrificial love that we love one another and take upon ourselves the burden of grief. And it is no small weight, which is why our Lord offers us this

encouragement today – “blessed are those who mourn.” But he does not just leave us with that. No, no. He says, “For you will be comforted.” And that is how we know that because of him we know that for those in Christ the love in our lives is not doomed to end in heartache, pain and loss.

Yes on All Saints Day we say “no” to those games of putting up walls and living in grief and broken hearts. Because on all saints day we recognize that we can love deeply, and indeed may the Lord cause us to love others deeper still. Because our Lord has a solution for the pain. Not a coping mechanism. Not a silly card with some sappy lines about living on in hearts and memories or looking down on us. No. Our Lord has a solution to the pain of losing a loved one in death, its called, giving that loved one back to you. Forever.

Time cannot fully heal the wounds of death. But hugging that person again, and all the drama forgiven, you better believe that will. And that is the hope and joy of all saints day found in the eternal life won by Jesus. Yes, we hurt, we mourn but we are blessed because as our Lord promises we will be comforted.

Our comfort isn't full yet, we aren't hugging them again yet. The wounds still nag, are still raw, maybe they have soured and infected with anger, bitterness, regret, or fear. May this, the Blessing of Jesus in the beatitudes, may the vision of the saints before God who are just fine and await your arrival at the celebration, may that be

the salve and bandage you wrap that wound with. Until, of course, it is fully healed when you see their smile once more. So may we be brave to love others even more. Even those outside the faith, how could we not want this for them, surely God does, so badly he would suffer for them, are we willing to suffer pain for them too and reach out – knowing, yes, they may push us away... Jesus looks for his lost sheep, and he will heal all your pain. So let's be brave he will heal all our wounds.

And it's hard to believe, I know, because, well, death is so horrible. They do a decent job getting them all set up in the casket and we know it's them, but something is horribly wrong. The breath of life is gone. And who is strong enough to undo that? Even more, it's hard to believe because our relationships, how many of them have their share of sin and awkwardness – are they going to smile when they see us again?

I think this is a good point to go back, once more, to the King. The very one who speaks to us today about the promised comfort for those who mourn. The one who sits on the throne before the saints washed in the blood of the lamb.

Did he not have deep wounds and hurts and betrayals as he was put lifeless and cold into a tomb? Which of those were left unhealed when he rose? His body warm, his eyes bright, his laughter full once more. And his people, who wronged

and denied him, which of them did he scream at? No, “Thomas, touch my hands and side.” “Peter, feed my lambs.”

May that be your balm in sorrow and regret. You will be comforted. You will see those saints again. Jesus will heal all your wounds. How do we know? Jesus is risen - we shall arise. Give God the glory Alleluia. Amen.