

The Feast of All Saints

Ps. 31

Rev. 7: 9-17

Jo. 16:

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen+

Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s back in Tennessee meant summer breaks were given over partially to the national past time, baseball. Nearly every boy in the neighborhood had a favorite team and player. I was partial to the New York Yankees and their star catcher, Yogi Berra. Not only was Yogi an excellent player, but he had the capacity to utter some of the most outrageous and unforgettable sayings ever spoken, and these were usually delivered with a straight face. Some of his more notable observations include: “It ain’t over till its over”, “a nickel isn’t worth a dime anymore”, “it’s no wonder people don’t show up here anymore, it’s too crowded”, and “if you come to a fork in the road, take it”. One day Mickey Mantle, the great slugger, came up to him and asked, “Yogi, what time is it?”, and Berra responded, “You mean right now”? Funny and outlandish as the comment is, there is something subtle and important hidden beneath it. As vital and meaningful as any present moment is to all of us, there is more to the time we have than is apparent on the surface. There is more than just “right now”. We are people who are terribly conscious of time are we not, but perhaps more of its passing than of its meaning. How many instances in a day do we stop, hold up our wrist, pull up a sleeve, and consult the instrument we call a watch, as if doing so will somehow put us in control of the passing moments? Consider the very name of the gadget, watch. It is less a noun or label, and much more a description of what we are doing! We are mindful of and countenance beginnings and endings, and of the duration of those things that occur between, whether they are projects to be achieved or relationships to be nurtured and treasured. How we come to view time, and the connections we have with one another in it, is of immense import, because that point of perspective will determine whether we see time as an enemy checking off pieces of our limited lives, or time as the moment and theater in which all things are held by God, including time itself. The first will lead us to move hectically through life fearing what will be lost. The latter places us and all we value into God’s hands and allows us to rejoice in the moments we have and will have. St Augustine, the 4th century theologian and bishop, commented that we should recognize that even time is a creature. It exists at the pleasure and behest of the Creator.

Today we are gathered because we all have one thing in common: we have lost someone over this past or other years to death. Time seems to have “caught up” with them and us. Whether we are daughters or sons, spouses or grand children, neighbors or friends, and even staff, this passing away leaves its footprint planted squarely in our lives and awareness. We have heard the Psalmist, in Psalm 31, cry out to God in struggle, anguish, grief, and soul felt loss. His trust in God is too honest not to level with the Lord of Creation about what he feels, fears, and hopes for. Do any of those words sound familiar or give voice to your experiences of loss and mine as well? We know full well what it means to have those we love slip away from us, and then we are faced with trying to fit the pieces of life back together. Sometimes the parts do not quite mesh and the world seems a little less whole, a little out of balance. We bring all our experiences, doubts, moments of disorientation with us when we stand before God, and that is perfectly proper, because that is where those things belong.

For nearly 19 centuries the Church has celebrated this day in its worship and faith. It is not that those we commemorate were somehow perfect or above the challenges of this life. These people

may have been Atlases to us at times and scoundrels at others, but those are not the reasons for this day. Rather it is to remind us that the bonds and connections we have had in time are not destroyed by death or the passing of time. A critical phrase stands out in this Psalm and we can pour our concerns into it. “My times are secure in your hands”. The writer of this poem prayer takes all that has happened with him and sees the momentary in light of this one unlimited acclamation. **My** times are secure in **Your** hands—Do you get where the emphasis belongs? It is not time as a human endeavor that is at stake. The point is that all *begins* in God. Time is not our possession, but is loaned to us. What I have is a gift that has been shared with me, and tracking it with a time piece misses the heart of the matter. This is not a general pondering about time, but a personal address to the One who holds everything. My life, your life, the lives of the saints matters in relation to God. This address reminds us that all we have and all we do past, present, and future, is in some way wrapped up with the Father who gave it to us first. The Hebrew really can be translated as, “my destiny” or as “this life story”. In a sense it means who I am and who my loved ones have been.

The word secure deserves a moment as well. Who we are is not lying around like a spare set of keys waiting to be lost or found. We are held, safe- guarded, carried, and sustained by God's faithfulness-not our own. When an object is secure it is so because it **belongs** to **someone**. All of our story and life belongs to the one who gave himself for us. That means that nothing, nothing of “my time” will be forgotten, lost, obliterated, even by death. This is why we can speak of the “communion of saints” in the Creeds. We are all, living, dead, and those to come intertwined because we are owned.

And finally we come to the heart and crux of the matter—**in Your Hands**. When we speak of God having hands it seems attributing to the Divine some human qualities, and so we are inclined to think of this as a metaphor. What we mean and celebrate here today is not casting ourselves into some sterile sense of fate where we battle and fight with the misfortunes of life until we cannot go on as if we were keeping a stiff upper lip in the face of it all. We are talking about the hands of God-God's word, intention, and action in the world. Those hands worked at the wood in a carpenter's shop, took children and blessed them, healed the sick and blind, touched the unacceptable with forgiveness, took bread and blessed and broke it, and finally had those hands nailed to a cross to defeat the final enemy, death. Those are the hands in which our times are secure. What time is it? No, I don't mean right now. I mean seeing anew that nothing in time or out of it is beyond God's care and love—including us and those for whom we give thanks today. So, it is true: My times are secure in Your hands. Amen+