

All Saints Day November 1, 2009 John 11:32-44

I have shown you these pictures for I wanted to share with you an All Saints Day tradition that's been practiced in Slovakia for generations. In the evening of All Saints Day families gather together and visit the graves of their loved ones. They pay respect and honor to them, as they share stories from their lives, as they remember how God blessed their lives through them. And then each member of the family lights a candle. As a reminder of God's light and love that shines through the darkness. They light a candle as a sign of hope trusting and believing that their loved ones are in a good place, that they are saints dwelling in the glory of our heavenly Father.

At the same time the twinkling light of a candle reminds the families that they are as well saints, living here on earth. They are reminded that they're called to let God's light shine through them and never let it go out. *For saints are the people who let God's light to shine through.* Our stain glass windows remind us of this calling. I thought I'd share with you this Slovakian tradition for as I remember it; my heart is filled with a warm feeling of hope. Knowing that this is not it. Trusting that our God has greater things prepared for us. And believing that one day death will be no more.

In the second reading John shares with us a vision that he had. A beautiful vision about new heaven and a new earth. *"I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."* John uses the picture of a bride and a groom, picture of new beginning where two parties are joined in one, where there is perfect unity of love. Isn't God great? On All Saints Day he reminds us of a wedding banquet. On a day when we're thinking about past memories, when we remember our loved ones who have gone before us our God reminds us of future and a new joyful beginning.

John continues with his vision and says: *"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. And death will be no more."* Now this is a promise on which we can build our lives. This is the promise that makes everything different. These are the true words of love and hope.

See God has a plan for you. He has a place for you, and he went ahead of us to prepare that place for us. And based on what we've just heard from John it's going to be a pretty nice place. In fact I believe it's going to be a place that's way beyond our expectations. (pause)

There is only one problem. We will not know what this place looks like or what this place feels like until it's our time to join with our Lord and all his saints. I know many of you have asked yourself that question: "But how can we be sure? How do I know that my loved ones are safe dwelling in the glory of God?"

These questions are often there. They are a part of our grieving process. They are a part of our healing. They are a part of our every day faith struggles. "If I could only know. If I could only be sure..." (pause)

In today's Gospel reading we hear about well know story; Jesus raising his good friend Lazarus from dead. You know Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha knew Jesus very well, in fact we know that Jesus loved them very much. And so when Lazarus got sick they send for Jesus, but Jesus stayed where he was for another two days.

Can we imagine the hopelessness of Mary and Martha as they saw their brother get worse and finally die. And there was no answer from Jesus. It was over they thought to themselves. (pause) We as well find ourselves in these kinds of situations. When we've been asking God to come and help us but he was not coming. No word, no help.

And then all of the sudden Jesus appears! He's approaching Bethany and one could say that he doesn't care, that he just took his time. But that's not the case. We hear that Jesus is greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. In fact we hear about Jesus starting to cry. (pause) Now that's the picture of God I want you to hold in your mind today. A compassionate and crying God. For even though it sometimes might seem like our God is not there for us, the truth is that he's there. And when our hearts are broken his is too. And when we need him the most, trust me he knows it. Even though things might not be making sense at all times, at the end everything will work out if we trust and have faith in our God.

But in the midst of this waiting, in the midst of our faith struggles, and doubts we will approach our God with Martha's words: "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" We say things like this for we're often time hurting. We feel this way for we can see only a small part of the picture. But our God sees the whole picture. He sees the whole masterpiece and trust me it's beautiful for he himself is painting it. He is the artist who says: "Once I'm done with my work it will be perfect."

But until then, it is your call to believe. It is your task to put your trust in me, says the Lord. That was his answer to Martha: "*Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the Glory of God?*" We live by faith and it is faith that no one can take away from us. (pause)

And then they took the stone away and Jesus said: "*Lazarus, come out!*" And the dead man came out. And we can only imagine the joy and celebration that followed. And in the following verses we read about how many Jews who were there that day, probably to mourn with Mary and Martha, how **they believed** in Jesus. In fact the Bible says: "*They put their faith in Jesus?*"

Where do we put our faith my friends? Do we believe in midst of our struggle when we can't see the end of the road? Do we have faith in our God? Do we believe that he is always there for us? Jesus says: "*If you believe, you will see the glory of God.*" That's a promise of our Lord to all of us. Can we put our trust into this promise? Can we believe that the light of Christ, is stronger than the darkness of death? Can we believe the words of Apostle John who said: "Death will be no more"?

For the truth is that all of us will have to face the end here on earth at some point. We've been given perishable bodies, bodies that are very fragile and last only for a time. But one day what's perishable will be replaced by imperishable, and we will be changed. The mortal will cloth immortality and death will be swallowed up in victory! And the light of God will shine forever, and all his saints will be reunited, their robes will be washed and they will shine in the Glory of God. Now that my friends is a picture I'm willing to put my faith in. That's the promise I'm willing to believe.

Amen