

All Soul's Day

Dignity and Destiny

On this "All Souls Day", I want to think with you about the soul and its relation to the body. To begin I want to share with you an image. At St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is one of the world's most famous sculptures, "the Pieta." It depicts our blessed mother enfolding in her maternal embrace, the crucified and dead body of her son. What is so striking about the Pieta is its detail. From a huge marble slab Michelangelo was able to shape and give form to this huge rock so that people today marvel and worship Jesus and revere our blessed Mother when in its presence.

With the Pieta there is no way to separate the marble from the image. They are intricately joined together. This is just like the relationship between the soul and the body. For Man is not merely a body, that is materialism. Nor is he merely a soul, that is spiritualism. He is one being in two dimensions, bodily and spiritual. And just as Michelangelo, who through his delicate carving breathed life into the marble so that it came alive, so too we affirm God has done with us. He has breathed life into our souls so that we can become living beings whose physical bodies give expression to the soul.

To know we are these creatures whose souls and bodies are intricately interrelated allows us to discover that these bodies have a dignity in the present because our souls have a destiny in the future that is great beyond our imagining.

In the reading from Isaiah we have language where the themes of dignity and destiny are interwoven throughout. Our soul's destiny, which is to share fully in the life of God, is compared to sharing in a banquet surpassing anything we have ever tasted before. Isaiah uses poetic imagery to paint a word picture. A great banquet is being laid by God on Mount Zion:

*On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.*

Here is soul food that is a banquet meant for all people. Wines so smooth and meat so succulent that God will be the Cordon-bleu chef that will inspire Gordon Ramsey and Jamie Oliver to sign up for culinary lessons. The point of course is clear. Our destiny is to share with God in a feast unlike anything we have known in this world. Another translation speaks of this mountain as a place where they shall drink gladness, they will drink joy. Isn't that a vivid image? Have you ever had wine that was so full bodied it was a glass of gladness, a goblet of joy? This joy, of course, means the joy of hope, of the hope rooted in Christ, because we will reign with him, and with him we will enjoy every spiritual joy and pleasure that surpasses our understanding.

That is our destiny. But we also know that in this life we have drink from the cup of sorrow. The goblet of salty tears. That the experience in this life is one where the soul becomes weighed down with a heaviness where we can forget who we are. Rather than seeing ourselves as works of art being shaped by the master sculptor we feel like the slab of unformed marble without value or dignity. And so we need to also hear what Isaiah says next:

*And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.*

What a contrast to the cloth covering the banqueting tables, heavy laden with food. Here is a cloth described as a shroud that is cast over the peoples. A spirit that is like the bleak grey skies characteristic of a November day. Here is imagined all that diminishes our true dignity..... the reality of death, the shroud of evil, soul destroying and body diminishing attitudes and practices that deprive us of knowing our true dignity and worth. When our dignity is diminished it is like what Lazlo Toth did to the Pieta in May 1972, when he took a hammer to it.

When with Isaiah we can imagine that God has come to not only lift but to destroy the shroud over the peoples and to swallow up death than we can hear what Isaiah says in the final verse from today's reading:

**It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.**

Now the Prophet is speaking to us from the future, from the other side of the sheet's destruction, when tears will be wiped away. The destiny so anticipated in now fully realized, the time of waiting is over so that the full effects of God's salvation are now fulfilled.

As we continue our journey through this world, as those who because of our bodies know what is to be weighed down with sorrow, may the vision of our destiny inspire us to reaffirm our present dignity. This is a dignity that when infused by the Holy Spirit enables us to know that God's love have been poured into our hearts. It is a dignity whereby Jesus was willing to die for us so we can and will live with him.

Please remember that we have a dignity and a destiny that for those whose souls have passed out of this world are further advanced towards the Mount Zion Banquet Hall. May we commend them to prayer as God prepares all those who in this life were open and receptive to the sculptor's chisel be formed to perfection in the life that is to come and so enter and sit at table to drink goblets of gladness and feast on magnificent meats.

This is the banquet Jesus is making ready for a vast company of people. For he came to do the will of the Father which in his own words is

“to lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”

The last day will be a festive day indeed because our dignity will be fully established because our destiny will have been attained. And there after the Second Coming with Resurrected bodies and souls fully alive, we with all for whom we pray today, will be masterpieces of superlative beauty as we dine together in the Father’s banqueting hall in the new have and new earth.