

Homily for All Souls Day

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. We are not merely a body, that is materialism. Nor are we merely a soul, that is spiritualism. We are 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. But in the present while still in these bodies our destiny that awaits the future is joined to the darkness of the present. Listen to Isaiah’s words:

*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.*

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 Friday. 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 is now fully realized, the time of waiting is over so that the full effects of God's salvation are now fulfilled.

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.