

Mortal bodies, mystical body

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

The Collect for All Saints', The Book of Common Prayer, page 245

ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY (25TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST)
Ecclesiasticus 44:1-10, 13-14, Psalm 149, Ephesians 1:11-23, Luke 6:20-31
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ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY
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THE GOSPEL READING: LUKE 6:20-31

Jesus looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you."

Scott Stoner is an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Chicago and the founder of *The Living Compass*, a holistic wellness initiative. Barb and Norm Anderson have known him for years from the summer chapel at their home in Wisconsin.

This past week Scott, a Chicagoan, wrote about Wayne

Williams, a man who drove 600 miles to an Indiana cemetery to listen to Game 7 of the World Series at the grave of his father. He did so to fulfill a promise the two of them had made years prior to listen to the Cubs together, if the Cubs ever made it to the World Series.

Scott also noted the

phenomenon of thousands of Cubs fans coming to the corner of Clark and Addison in Chicago, Wrigley Field, to write in chalk the names of loved ones who had passed away in the 108 years between the last World Series win and the one this past week.

Scott tells these stories to speak of “thin places” the term from Celtic Christianity, the ancient roots of Christianity in the British Isles and Ireland, describing the times and places in which we experience an especially strong connection with the spiritual world. Scott notes that a thin place may be strongly experiencing the presence of God, or a time or place where a person experiences the presence of a loved one who has gone on before.

Our mortal bodies lead us to our mystical body.

The collect for All Saints’ Day speaks of God knitting people together in the mystical body of Christ....

It is from Christ’s mystical perspective that we hear today’s gospel reading – in which what is truly real transcends the conventional experience of normal mortal life and humans really can become attuned to loving their enemies, doing good to those who hate, blessing those who curse, and praying for those who abuse – doing to others as we would have them do to us. It is only possible in the continual presence of the true and

living God revealed in the risen Christ.

Last week, I noted Fr. Richard Rohr says: “whenever the material and the spiritual coincide, there is the Christ.”

Jesus, in his embrace of the unsavory character Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, is saying that no one is outside God-given spiritual reality, that the material and the spiritual coincide in all people... and God delights and persists in this essential experience and expression of God’s own self beyond our grumbling, our divisions, our hostility, our destruction of self or others, our failures, our losses – even the loss of our own lives.

All of this is foundational to us as Christians. It is what Layla and Aubrey embrace in their baptisms today – what we affirm individually and as a community in every baptism.

And it will all be critical as we maintain our confident perspective through the election on Tuesday and its aftermath, which is likely to continue to be acrimonious in many of the same ways the campaign season has been.

We are people who, while mortal, are also engaged and participating in this larger, essential, mystical reality.

We are not alone, but are accompanied, by God in Christ, of course, and also by those we “love but see no longer,” in the words of

one of the prayers in the burial rite.

Thin places are not rare, if we want to awaken to them.

Fr. Richard writes of the Risen Christ as Jesus released from all space/time restrictions. He is beyond space; he is beyond time. He includes all of the spiritual and the physical world, reconciled within himself.

Fr. Richard speaks of the Ascension, that traditional telling of the phenomenon of Jesus “rising” to heaven and notes the telling question of the angels to those who stood gazing up into the sky when they asked: “Why are you standing here staring up into heaven?”

Fr. Richard concludes: Jesus didn’t go anywhere. He became the universal omnipresent Body of Christ.

He says: “We focused on ‘going’ to heaven instead of living on earth as Jesus did—which makes heaven and earth one. **It is heaven all the way to heaven. What you choose now is exactly what you choose to be forever. God will not disappoint you.**”

As we gather in this thin space today to recall these we have named and those on our hearts and in our minds who have gone before us, I want to remind you of the work of John O’Donohue, the Irish Catholic poet, philosopher and teacher who wrote extensively about death before his own untimely death in 2008. Here is an extended quotation from

his book *Anam Cara* on the topic: *Are Space and Time Different in the Eternal World?*

He writes:

When the soul leaves the body, it is no longer under the burden and control of space and time. The soul is free; distance and separation hinder it no more. The dead are our nearest neighbors; they are all around us. Meister Eckhart, the 13th-14th century mystic, was once asked, Where does the soul of a person go when the person dies? He said, no place. Where else would the soul be going? Where else is the eternal world? It can be nowhere other than here. We have falsely spatialized the eternal world. We have driven the eternal out into some kind of distant galaxy. Yet the eternal world does not seem to be a place but rather a different state of being. The soul of the person goes no place because there is no place else to go. This suggests that the dead are here with us, in the air that we are moving through all the time. The only difference between us and the dead is that they are now in an invisible form. You cannot see them with the human eye. But you can sense the presence of those you love who have died. With the refinement of your soul, you can sense them. You feel that

they are near.

This intercommunion of the living and the dead is an aspect of the spiritual life within Christianity that has persisted in various forms in all ages. Interestingly, in our age, discoveries of physics are offering new insights on the realities of space and time – and unmasking the false notion of distances that has previously been the province of the spiritual intuition.

Here we are: mortals who are also knit into a mystical body with one another and with all those who have gone before. It isn't really crazy or silly sentimentalism that might have a son listening to a Cubs game at his father's grave.

But more importantly, this is how God continues to so love the world in Christ in and through us, with the company and companionship of all the saints who have not, in fact, left us and with whom we can join together in loving, doing good, blessing, praying and doing to others as we would have them do to us – as our world so desperately needs.