

Today is the Sunday after All Saints Day, the day we remember and honor all the saints of the Church. We celebrate the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, and we hear the readings, and we say the prayers designated for All Saints Day.

Notice some of the language and some of the images called forth as we pray these prayers. In the Opening Collect we prayed that God has “knit together ... in one communion and fellowship, the mystical Body of Christ our Lord.” And in our Eucharistic Prayer we give thanks to God, saying, “for in the multitude of your saints you have surrounded us with a great cloud of witnesses, that we may rejoice in their fellowship.” “Therefore,” we say, “we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and all the company of heaven, who forever sing this hymn ... ‘holy, holy, holy ... heaven and earth are full of your glory.’”

It is appropriate that we renew our baptismal vows on this Sunday after All Saints Day, as baptism speaks to our union with ALL who have been baptized with Christ – from the time when Jesus stepped into the Jordan River to be baptized by John, to the present time, to time beyond our time.

Today's celebration is more than a remembrance of the saints of the past. It's an outward, visible expression of our union with all the baptized within the mystical Body of Christ. The saints participate in our worship. They pray with us and pray for us, and they encourage us by their witness and example. And today we recall when we stepped into that same Jordan River – metaphorically speaking – with Jesus and all the saints – past, present, and future.

If we remember the story of the Baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist and the multitudes were in the river, confessing their sins, responding to John's call for repentance. And Jesus, who had no reason to repent, could have kept his distance, and watched from the sidelines. But instead of looking down on the people from afar, he stepped into the river with the crowd. Rather than claiming innocence or distinction, Jesus chose to identify with the people who were seeking forgiveness for their sins. Jesus chose to be one of us, baptized in the same water, the same river – choosing communion with all the baptized, all the saints.

And after Jesus was baptized and was coming up out of the water, the heavens opened, and the dove descended, and the Voice proclaimed: “You are my beloved

Son; with you I am well pleased.” And the truth is, those same words are meant for you, and me, and all the baptized.

Two things: there are two things in particular today to note about this baptism. First, when Jesus steps into the river with the crowd (and you and me), he’s telling us that we are accepted. You are accepted – “Just as I am” as the song says. Jesus enters into the river WITH you and me.

And second. Jesus’s baptism begins his public ministry. Jesus is called to a purpose, just as all the baptized are called to a purpose. Two things: you and I are accepted by God; you and I are chosen by God for a purpose. I believe we are called by God to embody and proclaim the Gospel – the Good News of God’s love for all people.

I want to pause for a moment to say a few words about this word “gospel” – “good news.” Two thousand years ago in the Roman world it was the word used any time good news was announced from the emperor.

So when the angel announced to the shepherds, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people,” the angel was using familiar vocabulary. But, of course, the angel was proclaiming a radically different message – a shocking message: not so shocking that a messiah or savior was born; that claim was not unusual in the Roman world.

What turned the world upside down (Huston Smith tells us) was the Christian claim that God assumed a human form; that God was born a baby, and lived a human life; that God was willing to take on human flesh and live as a limited human being, and suffer, and die – that was the impossible, unbelievable, and even blasphemous claim of the Incarnation.

That’s the claim which was new; the claim which was “good news.” For this meant that God cared enough about creation; cared enough for you and me; was concerned enough about humankind to become flesh, and not only to suffer with us, but suffer for us.

That “Jesus wept” is good news. Today’s reading from John’s Gospel: Lazarus, a brother to Martha and Mary, and one whom Jesus loved, has died. Mary says, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.”

“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jewish community with her also weeping, Jesus was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus began to weep. So those gathered said, ‘See how he loved him!’”

As the story goes, people in the gathering wonder – along with Mary – why Jesus just let him die; if he was so powerful as to open the eyes of the blind, why hadn’t Jesus done something? We all wonder that from time to time. The stone is moved, Jesus cries with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man comes out, and Jesus tells the crowd, “Unbind him, and let him go!”

So, why did Jesus weep? The story tells us, he already knew what he was going to do. Already, he told Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” He wasn’t worried about Lazarus, or even the end of the story. He wasn’t frustrated with the crowd. “If you had been here” is, actually, a statement of faith.

So, why did Jesus weep? I think it’s the pain – everyone’s pain, the collective pain. Jesus is one of us. As one of our Eucharistic Prayers says: “you [God] in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us”

We are all connected. We are all knit together. We are all one – like one body. It’s like when I hit my thumb with a hammer. The rest of the members of my body don’t say, “I’m really sorry about that thumb, but it doesn’t really affect me.” The rest of the body typically moves with some urgency to relieve the pain, and heal the thumb. That’s why Jesus weeps.

One of my favorite theologians makes an observation I want to share. Beatrice Bruteau says that throughout history we have devised ethical systems and have preached a great deal about morality – often cultivating guilt and even demanding sanctions. And she observes that our preaching and punishing have been futile.

And stating the obvious further, she says that we have an understanding of reality which sees others as outside us, different, in competition with us, alien to us. We see the world in terms of separation, alienation, and domination. And she wonders if how we see reality is false.

So she offers another understanding of reality – a “metaphysic.” By “metaphysic” she means “a spontaneous and natural world view, the way we see reality without thinking about it, our taken-for-granted perception or outlook on life.”

And the understanding of reality she offers comes from Jesus of Nazareth – the second of the two great commandments, when he says: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

It’s not to “love your neighbor AS MUCH AS you love yourself.” It’s not to “love your neighbor IN THE SAME WAY AS you love yourself.” Bruteau suggests “it is to love your neighbor as ACTUALLY BEING yourself.”

Maybe that’s why Jesus wept. Maybe THIS is reality, and this is his natural, spontaneous, perception of reality; his taken-for-granted way of seeing the world.

Maybe that’s one thing Jesus wants us to see, the vision he wants us to have, every time we gather around bread and wine to celebrate Holy Communion. I’m suggesting that every time we gather for our Sacred Meal (communion), we see God’s vision for the world: union with God and one another; all of God’s children gathered around the Table at one. And not only do we see the vision, we participate in it with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven – all as one.

In the Name of the Holy Trinity, one God, in Whom we live, and move, and have our being. Amen.