

Halloween, , All Saints Day, All Souls Day – Día de los Muertos October 28th, 2018
Readings from Pentecost 24B: Ruth 1:1-18, Psalm 146, Hebrews 9:11-14, Mark 12:28-34

Connectedness: A Depth Reading of Life and Living

Introduction

I was born a twin. Two babies were not expected – only one. We were very premature. I was the first born, my sister, Dorothy, came later. I survived, Dorothy did not. I have no clear early memory of stories about our birth. They were repressed for obvious reasons – the pain of it all was too much to relive. I do understand that just as little was said in the family, the actual event of her death, hours after her birth, was not accompanied by a funeral or formal cremation. She was simply dispatched. All energies turned to saving me: a process of not just weeks, or months, but years. By the age of twelve, things changed, and I left my illnesses and weakness behind. At the age of 15, I experienced a dream. It was as clear as day. In that dream, I experienced Dorothy – we spoke, we inter-acted. I shared that experience some time later with my mother, aware that I needed to be prudent in what I said. On balance, it was a good thing to share with her, although the whole idea of engagement with a dead sister was hard to manage for both of us.

The impact of that experience, has coloured my thinking over the years. I believe that it was real. I believe that while it was not a strictly rational experience, nor was it irrational. I refer to it as supra-rational thing – beyond the rational. The experience has also shaped my understanding of the importance of connectedness, as a dimension of being human: that just as we are tied back to God as creatures (*religare*) we are also tied to each other: but not just with those who are our contemporaries (horizontal connectedness) but also those who have preceded us (vertical connectedness).

Scripture, Halloween, Day of the Dead and All Saints Day

But is this intuition, this conviction about the importance of connectedness or “tied back-ness” have any real basis when we think through the lens of Christian theology? Let’s refer to biblical thought first of all, and then turn to the Christian Calendar, to Christian feasts or festivals.

Scripture-wise, the idea of the necessity of connectedness to God is reiterated time and time again. It is fundamental to the Gospels and to the Letters – nor would it be new to you. Perhaps most obvious is the Gospel of John which speaks about our indwelling (*menein*), a mutuality with God through Jesus. Scripture also speaks repeatedly about our connectedness with each other as fundamental to human and Christian well-being. Indeed, our two readings today, celebrate the importance of the loving loyalty (*chesed*) of Ruth to her mother-in-law, Naomi; and the reading from Mark, speaks about the priority of love for God and for the other (each presupposes the other), over slavish religious rule keeping. That said, it is not until we get to the Book of Hebrews (not included today), that we discover a passionate emphasis upon our *connectedness with those who have preceded us, gone before us, those who have passed to us the stories about life and faith, who have lived the faith*. The term that is used for these people who are our ancestors in the faith, is “a cloud of witnesses. We are, says the author of Hebrews, connected to them through history and we look to them for encouragement, as we attempt to meaningfully live out our own human and Christian identity.

But, we can also go beyond Scripture to understand this connectedness with those who go before us, for it is also emphasized in this time of All Hallows Eve (Halloween – October 31st), All Saints Day (November 1st), and All Souls Day (November 2nd). *Halloween* is not about the dead emerging to take over, to threaten – a Celtic pagan idea – but about the celebration of the “communion of

saints", those who have preceded us. *All Saints Day*, is about we Christians looking back toward those who have set an example for us – the idea that we have just talked about in Hebrews. *All Souls Day*, is about we Christians taking a wider glance at ourselves and the world, asking God to actively bless all those who have gone before us, who have preceded us: all those 'ordinary' people who to greater or lesser extents lived the faith. My first real experience of this Christian idea of connectedness to those who have gone before us in the faith, was a photo – decades old – of my wife Gilda, with her father sitting in the cemetery of their home town in southern Chile. There was Gilda, large as life, about 8 years of age, with her candle sitting amid her grandparents and aunts' and uncles' tombs, on what Latin Americans refer to as *Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)*. For a Protestant like me, it seemed so macabre, a tad mystical, even superstitious; but she explained to me: "this is all about love, this is all about connectedness between us and those who shaped us, who provided the very foundation of life for us". She added, "some of my family were more Christian than others, some were more compassionate than others. But collectively they are ours and we are theirs."

Pious Claptrap

Is this all just pious claptrap? Metaphysical nonsense? I think not! Halloween, All Saints and All Souls Day, not to mention the insights of the New Testament and the Book of Hebrews; taken as a whole, is an important corrective to the way we modern, or post-moderns think – overwhelmed, overtaken as we are by our rampant individualism.

The Italian economist, Luigino Bruni, speaks eloquently of the importance of the Christian idea of connectedness as a way of battling, resisting disconnectedness and loneliness. In an article translated and published on the ABC Religion and Ethics website, entitled, "Our Modern Disconnectedness", Bruni, speaks of how modern market capitalism really only permits communities to function from particular consumption habits. Brands bring people together, as tribes, just as old totems in ancient societies, created cults of loyalty. As I read his piece, I could not help but think of the Apple label and its cultic status, where people become starry-eyed, autómatons, lauding the Apple brand. He ends by saying this:

Biblical humanism fought the idolatries of its time in order to free humans from the totemic and pagan cults of the surrounding peoples. The covenant with a God who creates out of an overflow of love, was also the liberation from the cults of objects and products, where the objects enchanted and chained people with their magic and occult powers.

Connectedness: connectedness with the God of life, connectedness with each other within history and across history, with our contemporaries and with those who have preceded us, with those of the faith – before and now – that, that is life!